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SCRIPTURE READINGS

FOR

SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES.



SCRIPTURE READINGS
FOR
SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

WITH COMMENTS.

FROM JOSHUA TO SOLOMON.

BY
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE,
AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE," ETC. ETC.

WITH A MAP



London :
MACMILLAN AND CO.

1872.

101. 2. 387.

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LONDON :
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
BREAD STREET HILL.

P R E F A C E.

THIS second part of the Readings carries on the narrative from the settlement of the Israelites in the Promised Land to the culmination of their prosperity under Solomon.

I have attempted to make the arrangement as chronological as possible, but this cannot be done with any certainty, as no date can be considered as absolutely fixed before the beginning of the kingdom and the establishment of the schools of the prophets, where history as well as sacred song was written.

With this endeavour, striving to follow the best supported and most reverent conjectures, I have been obliged to transpose the narratives in the Book of Judges a good deal ; bringing in the history of Ruth and the earlier chapters of Samuel where their dates seem to fix them. This may, I hope, assist teachers as well as pupils in understanding the bearing of events one upon the other. I have also introduced a few of the Psalms, and indicated others, in the hope that reading them in connection with the life of David may give a more vivid historical interest, and, what is more important, a stronger appreciation of their devotional and typical import. For it seems to me that nothing is a stronger protection against the "hindering and slandering of God's Holy Word" than that deep sense of its Unity and Divinity which is produced by

being early imbued with the typical and prophetical character of the Old Testament, and thus of its being part of the same design with the New, even to the smallest details—meaning, of course, those that are independent of human error in transcription or translation.

A third division, reaching to the return from the Captivity, and endeavouring to harmonize the Books of Kings and Chronicles, and illustrate them from the Prophets, is nearly completed.

C. M. YONGE.

OTTERBOURNE,

January, 1872.

CONTENTS.

BOOK III.

LESSON I.

	PAGE
JOSHUA TAKES THE COMMAND	3

LESSON II.

THE FAITH OF RAHAB	5
------------------------------	---

LESSON III.

THE PASSAGE OF THE JORDAN	7
-------------------------------------	---

LESSON IV.

THE MEMORIAL OF THE PASSAGE	10
---------------------------------------	----

LESSON V.

THE VISION OF JOSHUA	13
--------------------------------	----

LESSON VI.

JERICHO BESIEGED	15
----------------------------	----

LESSON VII.

JERICHO TAKEN	17
-------------------------	----

LESSON VIII.

ACHAN'S PUNISHMENT	20
------------------------------	----

LESSON IX.

THE AMBUSH AGAINST AI	PAGE 23
---------------------------------	------------

LESSON X.

THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE	25
--------------------------------------	----

LESSON XI.

THE GIBEONITES	27
--------------------------	----

LESSON XII.

THE LEAGUE AGAINST GIBEON	29
-------------------------------------	----

LESSON XIII.

THE BATTLE OF BETH-HORON	31
------------------------------------	----

LESSON XIV.

THE BATTLE OF LAKE MEROM	34
------------------------------------	----

LESSON XV.

THE LOT OF JUDAH	37
----------------------------	----

LESSON XVI.

THE LOT OF JOSEPH	40
-----------------------------	----

LESSON XVII.

THE DIVISION OF THE LAND	42
------------------------------------	----

LESSON XVIII.

THE FAREWELL TO THE TRIBES BEYOND JORDAN	45
--	----

LESSON XIX.

THE ALTAR OF WITNESS	47
--------------------------------	----

LESSON XX.	
JOSHUA'S WARNING	PAGE 50
LESSON XXI.	
JOSHUA'S FAREWELL	52
LESSON XXII.	
MICAH'S IDOLATRY	55
LESSON XXIII.	
THE FOUNDATION OF DAN	58
LESSON XXIV.	
THE ANGEL AT BOCHIM	63
LESSON XXV.	
DEBORAH AND BARAK	65
LESSON XXVI.	
JAEL AND SISERA	68
LESSON XXVII.	
THE CALL TO GIDEON	71
LESSON XXVIII.	
THE SIGNS GRANTED TO GIDEON	75
LESSON XXIX.	
THE MIDIANITE'S DREAM	78
LESSON XXX.	
THE TORCHES AND PITCHERS	81

LESSON XXXI.	
THE VICTORY	PAGE 84
LESSON XXXII.	
NAOMI AND RUTH	89
LESSON XXXIII.	
THE HARVEST AT BETHLEHEM	92
LESSON XXXIV.	
THE THRESHING-FLOOR OF BOAZ	95
LESSON XXXV.	
THE MARRIAGE OF BOAZ AND RUTH	98
LESSON XXXVI.	
JEPHTHAH'S VOW	101
LESSON XXXVII.	
JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER	103
LESSON XXXVIII.	
HANNAH'S PETITION	106
LESSON XXXIX.	
THE DEDICATION OF SAMUEL	109
LESSON XL.	
HOPHNI AND PHINEHAS	112
LESSON XLI.	
THE BIRTH OF SAMSON	116

CONTENTS.

xi

LESSON XLII.

	PAGE
THE CALL TO SAMUEL	119

LESSON XLIII.

THE LOSS OF THE ARK	122
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON XLIV.

THE ARK IN PHILISTIA	126
--------------------------------	-----

LESSON XLV.

THE RETURN OF THE ARK	128
---------------------------------	-----

LESSON XLVI.

SAMSON AND THE LION	131
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON XLVII.

SAMSON'S EXPLOITS	134
-----------------------------	-----

LESSON XLVIII.

SAMSON BETRAYED BY DELILAH	137
--------------------------------------	-----

LESSON XLIX.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON	140
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON L.

THE RESTORATION BY SAMUEL	143
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON LI.

THE ISRAELITES ASK A KING	146
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON LII.

THE APPOINTMENT OF SAUL	148
-----------------------------------	-----

LESSON LIII.	
THE ANOINTING OF SAUL	PAGE 151
LESSON LIV.	
THE CHOICE OF SAUL	153
LESSON LV.	
SAMUEL'S WARNING	156
LESSON LVI.	
SAUL'S FIRST DISOBEDIENCE	159
LESSON LVII.	
JONATHAN'S VENTURE	162
LESSON LVIII.	
THE ROUT OF MICHMASH	165
LESSON LIX.	
THE RASH VOW OF SAUL	167
LESSON LX.	
THE COMMISSION TO SAUL	170
LESSON LXI.	
THE SENTENCE UPON SAUL	172
LESSON LXII.	
THE ANOINTING OF DAVID	175
LESSON LXIII.	
DAVID SOOTHING SAUL	178

LESSON LXIV.	
GOLIATH'S DEFIANCE	PAGE 180
LESSON LXV.	
DAVID THE CHAMPION	182
LESSON LXVI.	
THE SLAYING OF GOLIATH	185
LESSON LXVII.	
SAUL'S JEALOUSY OF DAVID	188
LESSON LXVIII.	
DAVID'S MARRIAGE	191
LESSON LXIX.	
DAVID'S FLIGHT	193
LESSON LXX.	
THE SCHOOL OF PROPHETS	195
LESSON LXXI.	
SAUL'S NEW-MOON FEAST	198
LESSON LXXII.	
THE SHEWBREAD	200
LESSON LXXIII.	
THE CAVE OF ADULLAM	203
LESSON LXXIV.	
DAVID'S SONG OF TRUST	205

LESSON LXXV.

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE PRIESTS	PAGE 208
--	-------------

LESSON LXXVI.

THE DELIVERANCE OF KEILAH	211
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXVII.

THE TREACHERY OF THE ZIPHITES	213
---	-----

LESSON LXXVIII.

THE CAVE OF ENGADDI	215
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXIX.

THE CHURLISHNESS OF NABAL	217
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXX.

ABIGAIL'S INTERCESSION	221
----------------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXXI.

SAUL'S SPEAR	224
------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXXII.

DAVID AT ZIKLAG	227
---------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXXIII.

THE AMALEKITE FORAY ON ZIKLAG	229
---	-----

LESSON LXXXIV.

THE PURSUIT	232
-----------------------	-----

LESSON LXXXV.

THE PROPHETICAL THANKSGIVING	235
--	-----

CONTENTS.

xv

LESSON LXXXVI.

	PAGE
THE WITCH OF ENDOR	237

LESSON LXXXVII.

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA	241
--------------------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXXVIII.

THE TIDINGS TO DAVID.	243
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON LXXXIX.

DAVID KING AT HEBRON	247
--------------------------------	-----

LESSON XC.

THE PURSUIT FROM GIBEON	249
-----------------------------------	-----

LESSON XCI.

THE DEATH OF ABNER	252
------------------------------	-----

LESSON XCII.

DAVID KING OVER ISRAEL	255
----------------------------------	-----

LESSON XCIII.

THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM	258
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON XCIV.

THE SIN OF UZZAH	261
----------------------------	-----

LESSON XCV.

THE ARK BROUGHT TO MOUNT ZION	263
---	-----

LESSON XCVI.

THE BEGINNING OF PSALMODY	267
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON XCVII.

THE PROMISE TO DAVID	PAGE 269
--------------------------------	-------------

LESSON XCVIII.

DAVID'S VICTORIES	272
-----------------------------	-----

LESSON XCIX.

DAVID'S KINDNESS TO MEPHIBOSHETH	275
--	-----

LESSON C.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE GIBEONITES	277
---	-----

LESSON CI.

DAVID'S SIN	280
-----------------------	-----

LESSON CII.

NATHAN'S REBUKE TO DAVID	283
------------------------------------	-----

LESSON CIII.

DAVID'S PRAYER OF CONTRITION	286
--	-----

LESSON CIV.

THE DEATH OF DAVID'S CHILD	288
--------------------------------------	-----

LESSON CV.

EXPLOITS OF DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN	290
--	-----

LESSON CVI.

THE DEATH OF AMNON	293
------------------------------	-----

LESSON CVII.

THE RECALL OF ABSALOM	295
---------------------------------	-----

LESSON CVIII.

ABSALOM'S TREASON	PAGE 298
-----------------------------	-------------

LESSON CIX.

ABSALOM'S REBELLION	301
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON CX.

DAVID ON MOUNT OLIVET	304
---------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXI.

MORNING AND EVENING HYMNS OF DAVID'S REFRESHMENT AT BAHURIM	307
--	-----

LESSON CXII.

THE COUNSEL OF AHITHOPHEL	310
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXIII.

DAVID AT MAHANAIM	313
-----------------------------	-----

LESSON CXIV.

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM	316
--------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXV.

DAVID'S MOURNING	318
----------------------------	-----

LESSON CXVI.

DAVID'S RESTORATION	321
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXVII.

THE DISPUTE OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH	324
---	-----

LESSON CXVIII.

THE MURDER OF AMASA	326
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXIX.

DAVID'S CHOICE	PAGE 329
--------------------------	-------------

LESSON CXX.

THE PURCHASE OF THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE	333
--	-----

LESSON CXXI.

DAVID'S CHARGE TO SOLOMON	335
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXXII.

DAVID'S GREAT THANKSGIVING ANTHEM	338
---	-----

LESSON CXXIII.

THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL	340
--	-----

LESSON CXXIV.

THE REBELLION OF ADONIJAH	343
-------------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXXV.

THE DEATH OF DAVID	346
------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXXVI.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE REBELS	349
--	-----

LESSON CXXVII.

THE WORDS OF KING LEMUEL, WHICH HIS MOTHER TAUGHT HIM	352
---	-----

LESSON CXXVIII.

A FEW VERSES OF THE SONG OF SONGS	355
---	-----

LESSON CXXIX.

SOLOMON'S MARRIAGE	358
------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXXX.	
THE CHOICE OF SOLOMON	PAGE 362
LESSON CXXXI.	
THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON	365
LESSON CXXXII.	
THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE TEMPLE	369
LESSON CXXXIII.	
THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE	372
LESSON CXXXIV.	
THE DEDICATION	376
LESSON CXXXV.	
THE BLESSING OF SOLOMON	379
LESSON CXXXVI.	
SOLOMON'S INTERCESSION	381
LESSON CXXXVII.	
THE ANSWER TO SOLOMON	385
LESSON CXXXVIII.	
SOLOMON'S PRAISE OF WISDOM	388
LESSON CXXXIX.	
SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY	392
LESSON CXL.	
THE FALL OF SOLOMON	395

LESSON CXLI.

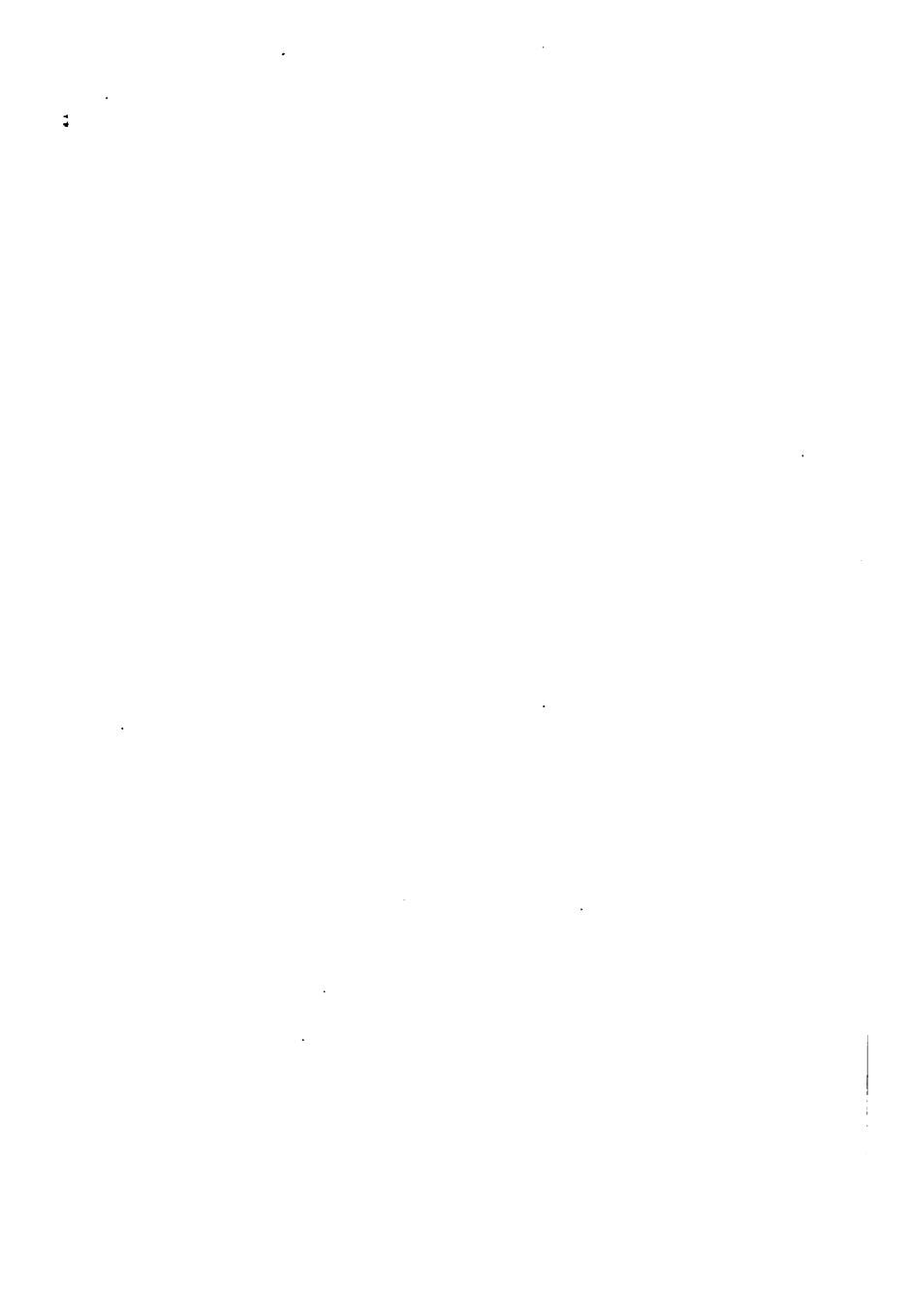
THE APPOINTMENT OF JEROBOAM	PAGE 398
---------------------------------------	-------------

LESSON CXLII.

SOLOMON'S WEARINESS	400
-------------------------------	-----

LESSON CXLIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER	403
--	-----



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHILDREN.

VOL. II

B

BOOK III.

LESSON I.

JOSHUA TAKES THE COMMAND.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA I.

NOW after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister,* saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them.

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,

Pass through the host,† and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

* Servant.

† Army.

And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.

According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.

COMMENT.—The last chapter of Deuteronomy was probably added by the writer of the book in continuation, either by one of the priests or by Joshua himself. The camp had been left in silence and awe when the great and holy man to whom each had looked since his earliest youth for government and guidance had been lost to sight on the mountain. There was a waiting time, and then the Voice spake and announced that the thing they could scarce believe was true, and that Moses was dead. But it was to the chosen successor of Moses that the Voice spake, and it called him not to mourn, but to conquer. The bounds of the land were traced out from Lebanon just seen in the distance, and the blue Mediterranean, that great sea in the west, even to the great river Euphrates to the east, and to the wilderness to the south. These were the utmost limits. Once the Israelite kingdom reached them, in the time of Solomon. Otherwise the sins and idolatries of the people prevented the perfect fulfilment of the promise. But wherever the faithful Joshua should turn his arms, he would conquer. All that was required of him was to "be strong and of a good courage," and to keep the law constantly in his mind. So should he have good success and prosper.

And the people, heartened and encouraged by the noble exhortations of Moses, and trained from their youth in obedience and faith, pledged themselves to obedience to Joshua, and replied with that same watchword, "Be strong and of a good courage." So does our Joshua, the Captain of our Salvation, call on us to go forth with him conquering and to conquer—to conquer our sins and to win the kingdom of heaven, and still all that is required is the same, "Be strong and of a good courage."

LESSON II.

THE FAITH OF RAHAB.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA ii. 1—23.

And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim* two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into a woman's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

* The Acacias.

And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not.

COMMENT.—Again Joshua sent out men to reconnoitre. During the forty years that the Israelites had spent in the wilderness, a king of Egypt, whose ensign was the hornet, had entered Palestine by the more direct way, overrun the country, and broken the strength of the Amorites, so that the cities might be strong in themselves, but the nations who held them, especially in the south, were much enfeebled. Israel had been led this long way round by the east of the Dead Sea, that they might fall upon the country in the central knot of hills that forms its strongest position, so that, these once conquered, the whole land might be in their grasp. Here then lay the host, with Jordan before them, and Jericho, a strong walled city, enclosed by lovely groves of palm-trees, guarding the passage of the strong deep river, just where it flows into the sluggish sea.

The two men safely passed the river and entered the city at eventide. The great camp had been lying in the neighbourhood for a full year, and though the host did not maraud like Amalekites or Midianites, it was known that there was a more serious purpose of conquest than was ever entertained by those wanderers, and it was jealously watched. On the first report that two men from thence had entered the town and gone to Rahab's house, which seems to have been a place of entertainment for travellers, she was summoned

to give them up. Then she began to show her faith. She was different from her fellow-citizens, in that, though all alike saw that Divine power must have led the Israelites through such a course of miracles, they tried to fight against that will, while she bent to it. She hid the spies under the stalks of flax which were laid out to dry on the flat roof of her house, which was built against the city walls, while she gave a false direction to the men who were in search of them; and before letting down her guests over the walls, she advised them to hide for three days in the hills of Abarim, lest they should meet their enemies returning from the pursuit. Then she besought that she and her family might be spared, and the spies bade her mark her house with the scarlet cord by which she was about to let them down. That cord would be her safeguard, as the blood of the Passover had been to the firstborn of Israel. The red streak would secure safety to those within. So does the red streak of our Blessed Lord's precious Blood mark the truly faithful for salvation, when this sinful world shall be destroyed.

LESSON III.

THE PASSAGE OF THE JORDAN.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA iii.

And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.

And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host;

And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits* by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

* 1,500 yards, not much less than a mile.

And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify* thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.

And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.

And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.

And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people;

And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,)

That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea,† failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean‡ over Jordan.

COMMENT.—The name of Jordan means "Descender." No large river has so swift or descending a course as this: rising in the hills of Dan, and rushing down its narrow wooded ravine to the steaming cauldron of the Dead Sea, the lowest piece of water in all the world. Bridges as yet were unknown; fords there were in some few places; but when the winter snows on the mountains melted in the spring (the harvest-time of Palestine), it overflowed its banks, and the fords could not be used. How carry the

* Make great.

† The Dead Sea

‡ Quite

multitude across—women, children, cattle, tents—in the face of an enemy alarmed and on the alert for a long time past, though no doubt relaxing their watch to gather in their crops, in the sure confidence that the swelling of the Jordan would render it a sufficient barrier, and certainly only guarding the fords? This was the time God chose to magnify Joshua; that is, to do him honour and make him great in the eyes of the people, by showing him to be as much His wonder-working servant as Moses had been.

And it was a wonderful command that Joshua was to give the priests. They were to take up the Ark of the Covenant and bear it on their shoulders, leaving a space not much short of a mile between them and the rest of the people, and with their holy charge they were to walk straight on into the overflowing water, never pausing till they had reached the middle of the bed of the river, where they were to stand still.

It was a command requiring more resolute faith than had been shown at the Red Sea, for there the waters had left their bed bare before any one entered it; here the priests were to go actually down, as it seemed, into the waters before the miracle was worked. No sooner, however, had they dipped their feet into the water, than at the city Adam, thirty miles up the river, a sudden check came on the rushing torrent. It stood still, and the water piled itself up in a heap waiting to be free again! "The waters saw Thee, O God, and were afraid: the depths also were troubled." This was to the north; to the south the water was cut off, and the stony bed of the river lay bare. There stood the priests in the midst, with the Ark on their shoulders, while the people crossed. First the men of Reuben, Gad, and Gilead, who, having no families or cattle to take care of, formed the vanguard, went over armed to protect the arrival of the rest, and then all the host, in their tribes, slowly and steadily marched across in their order, while all the time the Ark, on the shoulders of the priests, remained in the midst to guard their crossing.

[Such was the wonderful passage of the Jordan. To us it has two meanings, but one is enough for this day. When we think of the sojourn of Israel in the wilderness as foreshadowing the life of each Christian, the Red Sea represents our Baptism, and the

rapid, dangerous river between the wilderness and the Land of Promise is "the stream, the narrow stream of death." Our feet must enter the dark waters, we must go down into its depths, but the Ark of the Covenant, the Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ with His Church, is our stay; and when once passed, our Rest will be a more real rest than that of Israel.]

LESSON IV.

THE MEMORIAL OF THE PASSAGE.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA iv. 1—18.

And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man,

And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night.

Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man :

And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel :

That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?

Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD ; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off : and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.

And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over* with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood : and they are there unto this day.*

For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto

* At the time the Book of Joshua was written.

the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua : and the people hastened and passed over.

And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people.

And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them :

About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho.

On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel ; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan.

Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

COMMENT.—All the multitude of Israelites had crossed the river safely, but still the Ark, on the priests' shoulders, was left in the midst, waiting for a sign from God. There was more to be done ; the wonderful deliverance was never to be forgotten, and therefore a solid monument of it was to be set up. Joshua then called one strong man out of each tribe, and bade him take up one of the large stones in the bottom of the river bed, and carry it out to the bank. Then twelve more stones, so large and tall that they would tower above the water, were carried down and set up in order in the midst of the channel. Thus every after generation of Israelites would see a row of twelve great water-worn rocks on the bank, and again a row of twelve pointing up above the river, and they would be told that they were the proofs that the whole host of Israel had marched on dry land through the midst of their boundary stream, by the great power of God. The stones were there when the Book of Joshua was put together, they were still visible in our Lord's time, and even up to the year 1217.

After this the priests came up out of the river, and the waters rushed down into their place as before ; but never was the wonder forgotten. In memory thereof came those beautiful promises by the mouth of Isaiah, "When thou passest through the waters,

I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Is. xliii.) ; while another singer has given us a beautiful short Psalm, the 114th, summing up and exulting over the wonders that changed the face of nature :—

When Israel went out of Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a strange people ;
Judah was his sanctuary,
And Israel his dominion.

The sea saw it and fled :
Jordan was driven back.
The mountains skipped like rams,
The little hills like lambs.

What ailed thee, O thou Sea, that thou fleddest ?
And thou, Jordan, that thou wast driven back ?
Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams ?
Ye little hills, like lambs ?

Tremble, thou Earth, at the presence of the LORD,
At the presence of the God of Jacob ;
Who turned the hard rock into a standing water,
The flint stone into a springing well.

[Jordan is the end of the types concerned with the wilderness. In this respect it answers to death. But another set of types begins from this time. Israel in the Promised Land answers to us Christians in the state of salvation that our Lord, the true Joshua, has brought us to—where we have to win our way, and fight our fight. Looked on in this manner, Jordan answers to the water of baptism, which admits us into this "kingdom of heaven that is to be won by violence," that is by a constant battle with the evil things that infest it, even as the Seven Nations did the Holy Land.]

LESSON V.

THE VISION OF JOSHUA.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA v.

And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.

At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Circumcise again the children of Israel the second time.

And Joshua circumcised the children of Israel.

And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt.

Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised.

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal* unto this day.

And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.

And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day.

And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now

* Rolling away.

come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

COMMENT.—The tidings that the great host of desert wanderers were over the river were terrible enough, but when to this was added that the stream had stopped to let them pass, no wonder the Amorites trembled in their hills, and the Canaanites on their plains. There was no courage nor spirit left to attack this strange enemy, and in the meantime there was a rest on the new soil of the Land of Promise, during which Joshua was able to repair the breaches of the Law that could not be avoided in the desert life. First, all who had been born in the wilderness were circumcised, and thus the reproach of having forgotten God's commandment to Abraham was removed or rolled away, and the place in consequence was named "Gilgal." Now that God was fulfilling His promise was the fit time to admit the people to take it on themselves.

Now, too, it was possible to keep the Passover. One—the first—had been kept under Mount Sinai, but during the forty years' punishment there had been no bread wherewith to keep it, only the manna, and probably no one under forty years of age had ever seen bread till the conquest of Bashan. Here, however, at Gilgal, they obtained the corn of the former year, for the new harvest was not yet gathered in, and so soon as they had tasted of it the heavenly manna ceased to fall, and there only remained that which had been laid up in the golden pot in the Holy of Holies.

Just after this Joshua had a great vision. He beheld a man with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua knew him not at first, but the words that he spake, and the command he gave, showed who he was. The Captain of the Lord's host is no other than the LORD Himself, JEHOVAH, our Salvation. He had come to lead Joshua and the Israelites to conquer, and He is likewise the Captain of our Salvation. He goeth forth conquering and to conquer, and His armies are with Him still. And every one of those who has been sworn manfully to fight under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the flesh, belongs to that army of His.

LESSON VI.

JERICHO BESIEGED.

B.C. 1451.—JOSH. vi. 1—14.

Now Jericho was straitly* shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.

And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass† the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.

And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD.

And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD.

And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them.

And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward‡ came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout.

So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.

And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.

And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days.

* Closely.

† Go round.

‡ Guard of men behind.

COMMENT.—There was nothing so needful for the Israelites to learn as that it was God who fought for them. Therefore their first siege was this very remarkable trial of faith. No arrow nor stone was to be launched against the city; no one was to endeavour to scale the walls or break the gates; only every day for seven days the army, with the priests bearing the ark, should go round about the city; seven priests, each with a trumpet made of a curved ram's horn, marching in front. Day after day was this to go on. The circuit was to be steadily made, though the enemy might mock at so strange a way of attacking a strong city, and though they might shoot arrows, or break forth from their gates at the long procession. One day after another the strange march took place: nothing happened, and still they went on obediently, because, after these long years of training, the host whom Joshua led had at last learned to trust to their Almighty God, and that to obey implicitly, however little they could understand, was the sure way to safety and glory.

And how are we to look at Jericho? It seems to have been the worst city in Palestine, languid and vicious in the steamy luxury of the climate, liable too to become a stronghold of robbers. It is always mentioned for evil, never for good, save that once, when our Lord visited Zaccheus and healed Bartimeus there, single persons were, like Rabab, redeemed out of it. It means then this wicked world, against which we have to fight under our Joshua. Let us read of that Captain and that warfare as seen in vision by St. John:—

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The armies that follow are in white linen, like the priests. We do not hear that they use weapons of attack ; no, but they follow their captain. They go round about the city of destruction, they do not seek to injure it, but they are not of it ; they hold aloof, and regard neither its attacks nor its allurements. And by and by the victory is won.

LESSON VII.

JERICHO TAKEN.

JOSHUA vi. 15—vii. 5.

B.C. 1451.—“ *We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what thou hast done in their time of old ; how thou hast driven out the heathen with thy hand, and planted them in ; how thou hast destroyed the nations, and cast them out. For they gat not the land in possession through their own sword, neither was it their own arm that helped them : but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.*” (Psalm xlv.) *Thus was the praise of God for the conquest of Canaan sung in after times. Thus did Israel learn that “there is no other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God,” and that when acting under His commands they were secure of victory.*

And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times : only on that day they compassed the city seven times.

And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout ; for the LORD hath given you the city.

And the city shall be accursed,* even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD : only Rahab shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated† unto the LORD : they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.

* The word here properly means “devoted.”

† Set apart.

So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into Rahab's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her.

And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.

And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

And Joshua saved Rahab alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

And Joshua adjured * them at that time, saying,

Cursed be the man before the LORD,

That riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho:

He shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn,

And in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.

So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised † throughout all the country.

But the children of Israel committed a trespass ‡ in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few.

So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.

And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

COMMENT.—After the week of patience, the trumpets sounded, the people sent forth a great shout, and the walls of Jericho fell down flat. For in all ages "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they compassed about seven days. By faith Rahab perished not

* Laid them under a threat.

† Spoken loudly.

‡ Sin.

with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." (Heb. xi. 31.) And for the sake of the faith that made her cast in her lot with the people of God, and bind the scarlet line on her window, Rahab was not only saved in the general slaughter, but she was made one with Israel by marriage, for she became the wife of Salmon, the head of the tribe of Judah, and her name is one of the three female ones which are mentioned in the ancestry of our Lord.

The word translated in the Bible "accursed," as here used, rather means *devoted*. The sense is that Jericho, being the first place taken, belonged to the Lord as the firstfruits of conquest, just as did the firstfruits of the cattle and the trees. Therefore nothing in it was to belong to the children of Israel. Every living thing was to be put to death. The people were under sentence of death in all the towns, lest they should corrupt the Israelites ; and the cattle were here also to die, that there might be no temptation to steal from the Lord. Only the imperishable metals were to be brought into the treasury. The taking anything for private use would be not merely breach of discipline, but robbery of God ; and as there was one believing soul in wicked Jericho, so there was one worldly selfish heart in Israel, who took of the consecrated property of the Lord, and thus stained the whole camp. This time, when God Himself was going forth with their armies, was a time of deep awe and strict severity. The city that was taken by the power of God without visible help of man, the wicked city marked by His wrath, was to be left waste, and if any man presumed to build it again it would be amid the deaths of all his children ; the first at the laying the foundation-stone, the last at the setting up the gate. So prophesied Joshua ; and when men grew faithless the attempt was made, and the prophecy was fulfilled.

LESSON VIII.

ACHAN'S PUNISHMENT.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA vii. 6—26.

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

And Joshua said, Alas, O LORD God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!

O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!

For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ * us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?

And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?

Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled † also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. ‡

Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.

In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man.

And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken:

And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the

* Surround.

† Used falsehood

‡ Goods.

Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken:

And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.

And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:

When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment,* and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge† of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it.

And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.

And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.‡

And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.

COMMENT.—There is a great deal to observe in these verses. First, how when Joshua gave way for a moment to dismay at the defeat, his faintness of heart is sharply rebuked as a failure and weakness in him, whose duty it was to be strong and of a good courage. Next, we see that the whole body is held to be defiled and made to suffer for the sin of one member, as long as the evil is not put away. Both these things are for our example.

God taught Joshua how to bring the fault home to the offender in the presence of all the people by the casting of lots. This was, in the times when God was to His people instead of King, the way of committing the choice or judgment to Him. Probably the manner was: a vessel was placed before Eleazar, or else the skirt of the priest's robe was spread between his knees into a lap,

* An embroidered garment such as was worked in Assyria.

† Tongue-shaped jewel.

‡ Causing trouble.

in which twelve tiles or bits of skin or leaves were cast, each bearing the name of a tribe. Either Joshua or the priest, or else perhaps a little child, drew out one of these. It was that on which the name of Judah was written. This set all the other tribes free from suspicion. Then the names of the three sons of Judah—Pharez, Zerah, and Shelah—were put in. The lot fell on Zerah. He had had five sons, and their names were the next. Of them Zabdi was chosen, and each head of a family among his children was then named. One guilty heart must have trembled as the unerring lot came nearer and nearer. Carmi was marked out, and then, when his sons were put in, the lot fell upon Achan. The Eye had watched him when he thought none could see him, as surely as it watches us ; and the punishment of deeds of darkness will never miss, though it may be longer deferred than was his. Still one hope was left to the miserable man. Free confession would—in Joshua's kind and fatherly words—"glorify God ;" so that even while Achan suffered there might be pardon. The confession was made, and as if in the spirit of true repentance. The spoil that had been set apart beforehand as sacred to the Lord had tempted him, and he had hidden the richly-worked robe, the silver and the gold, in the earth under his tent. There they were found, and then came the terrible judgment on those who had robbed God—on Achan, the troubler of Israel, as he is called in the Book of Chronicles, and on all his family. It was a part of the Law that "the children shall not be put to death for the fathers," but Achan's family had no doubt known, concealed, and thus shared his sin ; nor could the cattle of the sacrilegious man be shared among his kindred. Therefore all died by stoning, the regular form of execution among the Jews. Nor was it a very cruel death. The persons to suffer were usually placed on the edge of a precipice, and the first heavy stone was so aimed as to strike the head, throw them down, and thus usually kill them, or at least stun them at once, and the next stone thrown on the chest was almost certain to end the work. A great heap of stones was the monument of the danger of sacrilege—that is, of robbing God ; and the spot was called the Valley of Achor—that is, "Causing trouble."

LESSON IX.

THE AMBUSH AGAINST AI.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA viii. (*abridged*).

And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed : take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai : see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land :

And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king ; only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves : lay thee an ambush* for the city behind it.

So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai : and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night.

And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city : go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready :

And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city : and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us as at the first, that we will flee before them.

For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city ; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first : therefore we will flee before them.

Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city : for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.

And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire : according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.

And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they halted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain ; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.

And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them : and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city.

* Men put in hiding.

And there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el, that went not out after Israel : and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai ; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city.

And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand : and they entered into the city, and took it, and hasted and set the city on fire.

And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way : and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers.

And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again and slew the men of Ai.

And the other issued* out of the city against them ; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side : and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.

And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide : and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day.

COMMENT.—Though the city of Jericho had been miraculously given over to the Israelites, they were to win other places by the usual rules of warfare, only with the Lord blessing their arms. And the city where they had been beaten while Achan's sin was still among them was in a place they must have heard of with honour and reverence, for Abraham had built an altar in a valley with Ais on one side and Bethel on the other—Bethel, which later took its name from the dream of Jacob.

Joshua drew profit from his former defeat. He sent 30,000 men to hide themselves in that very valley,† while he drew out the main body of his army in the other valley in front. On the third day the King of Ai came confidently out to battle, and Joshua feigned that his army was beaten, and took to flight. All the warriors of Ai rushed out of their city, leaving the gates open, and

* Came out.

† He sent 5,000 more to join them the next night (verses 9 to 12)

they were joined by those of Bethel, to hunt their enemies. Then Joshua gave the signal by stretching out his spear. He had probably reached some height where he could be seen by the men in ambush, for they instantly obeyed, and hastened to the open gates of Ai. There they set fire to the town; and so soon as Joshua saw the smoke, he faced round and began to fight with the men of Ai. It was of no use to fly, for the city was on fire behind them, and the men who had been in ambush came out and attacked them on the other side.

Thus it was that Ai was utterly destroyed. Joshua held up his spear, or leading staff, all the day till the work was over and the city lay in ruins, the King beneath a heap of stones where the gate had been.

[This, we may believe, was a continuation of that same type that we first saw in Moses at the battle of Rephidim. The Mediator stretches out His hands all day, as long as His people have their battle with sin to fight, and again the victorious Saviour upholds His Cross, their banner, until sin, the world, and the devil shall all be destroyed.]

Ai not being the firstfruits like Jericho, there was no special dedication of the spoil, but it was shared among the victors; only all the inhabitants were slain, as being under the direct sentence of God. The city never appears to have been rebuilt, and the exact place where it once stood is uncertain.

LESSON X.

THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA viii. 30—35.

Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal, As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant* among them.

COMMENT.—The conquest of Ai had brought Joshua close upon Shechem, which was to be the inheritance of his own tribe. But his thought was to obey the command given by God through Moses, that on the entry into the Land of Promise the terms on which it was held should be proclaimed from Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

As this is a short lesson, turn back to Book II., Lesson lxxi., and read the commands of Moses respecting it. Then think of the solemn scene there must have been, half the tribes standing on the slopes of the one hill, half on the other, the valley between filled with white-robed priests and Levites surrounding the Ark of God, and Joshua with his victorious spear, and the roll of the Book of the Law left him by Moses.

His voice began, "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image." The Levites took it up in one mighty and terrible chant, and from the bare rocky hill of Ebal came back an Amen from thousands and thousands of voices, as he went through all the curses; then through all the blessings, with the responses from Mount Gerizim. And lastly, Joshua read through the whole of the choice that had been put before the people, both at Sinai and at Pisgah—the description of joy and prosperity on the one hand, and of woe, misery, and desolation ever increasing on the other—as in the 26th of Leviticus and the 28th of Deuteronomy. Men, women, children, and the strangers conversant among them, such persons as Hobab and his Midianites, or any Edomites and Moabites who might have joined them, or the descendants of the

* Who were on friendly terms with them.

multitude that came out of Egypt with them—all alike were to hear it. No doubt they listened and wondered how any one could be likely to be so senseless as to turn aside from such a God as theirs and to become in danger of such horrors.

And the prophecy is still read by the Jews,—but how? In general they think it an honourable thing to read the lessons from the Scripture in a loud voice in the synagogue, and in some places sums of money are offered for the privilege of reading them; but when this one comes in course, no one can bear to hear or read it. A very poor beggar is therefore paid to come and stand close by the appointed reader, who mutters it into his ear, so that no one else may have the pain of hearing the exile foretold that they are still suffering. The veil is on their hearts indeed, since they will not yet own why that curse has come on them. But if we know their punishment, let us beware that we are not cast out of *our* promised land for the like unbelief.

LESSON XI.

THE GIBEONITES.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA ix. 1—15.

And it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea * over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard thereof;

That they gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord.

And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai,

They did work wilily,† and went and made as if they had been ambassadors,‡ and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles,§ old, and rent, and bound up;

And old shoes and clouted|| upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy.

And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league¶ with us.

* The Mediterranean.
§ Skin bags.

† Cunningly.
‡ Mended.

‡ Messengers.
¶ Promise of friendship.

And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us ; and how shall we make a league with you ?

And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye ? and from whence come ye ?

And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God : for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt,

And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroath.

Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants : therefore now make ye a league with us.

This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you ; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy :

And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new ; and, behold, they be rent : and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.

And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.

And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live : and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

COMMENT.—When the tidings of the ruin of Ai reached the other kings of Canaan, they supposed that these invaders might be driven back by the united forces of all the nations, and began to muster their forces against them. One tribe of the Hivites, however, who lived in the midst of the high hills afterwards given to Benjamin, perceived that it was vain to fight, and resolved to make terms for themselves. Their name, Gibeonites, means “ dwellers on a height,” but they saw that their fastnesses would not avail before this terrible conquering power. They did not, however, go honestly to work. They were afraid they should not be spared if the Israelites knew that they lived in the midst of them, so they pretended to belong to a distant country, and to have been brought by the fame and terror of the name of Israel. The messengers came to the camp at Gilgal, whither Joshua had returned after the great commination at Shechem, with every token of having come from a long journey, with worn-out sandals and garments, mouldy bread, and the goat-skins in which wine was carried old and patched ; and these they showed to the people of Israel, to prove that they had travelled from a far country, whither the fame of these great miracles and

victories had penetrated. Probably the Israelites were flattered by supposing their name to have spread so far, for they asked no counsel from the Urim and Thummim, but at once promised their alliance to the Gibeonites, and engaged to let them live. All the elders took an oath to that effect, and thus the trick secured the *lives* of the people. If they had dealt openly, no doubt they would, like other strangers from time to time, who owned the God of Israel, have been gradually gathered into the tribes among whom they dwelt, and received into the commonwealth of the chosen people ; but their half-trust and their deceit were to have their punishment.

LESSON XII.

THE LEAGUE AGAINST GIBEON.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA ix. 16—x. 5.

And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them.

And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim.

And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes.

But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel : now therefore we may not touch them.

This we will do to them ; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.

And the princes said unto them, Let them live ; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation ; as the princes had promised them.

And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you ; when ye dwell among us ?

Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

And now, behold, we are in thine hand : as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do.

And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not.

And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it ; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king ; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them ;

That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty.

Wherefore Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem sent unto Hoham king of Hebron, and unto Piram king of Jarmuth, and unto Japhia king of Lachish, and unto Debir king of Eglon, saying,

Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon : for it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel.

Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together, and went up, they and all their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it.

COMMENT.—When the deceit of the Gibeonites was found out, there was of course great indignation ; but here is a great example, that however rash a promise may have been, and however inconvenient, it must be kept : even as in the 15th Psalm we find that the good man is “he that sweareth unto his neighbour and disappointeth him not, though it be to his own hindrance.” Yet the deceit of the Gibeonites was punished. If they had held five strong cities in the heart of the land, they would have been able to keep up idolatry, and do infinite harm to the Israelites. Therefore they were to be reduced to a sort of easy slavery, for the service of the Sanctuary, under the care of the priests, who would thus instruct them in the worship of the God whom they had ignorantly and blindly accepted in their fear. And we shall find that their lives were in after times so sacred, that heavy vengeance fell on Saul’s family for the slaying of them. Under the name of Nethinim, or “dedicated” they were

given to the priests (1 Chron. ix. 2), and with them (Ezra viii. 20) they came back from the captivity at Babylon, after which their constancy seems to have outworn their long doom of subjection, for we hear no more of them separately, and they must have been reckoned among the Jews.

At first, however, they were in great danger, for the nations of the surrounding country, who had already been preparing to unite their forces against Joshua, were greatly dismayed and angered at hearing that one of the strongest cities in the whole land had made terms with the enemy, and were determined first to use their arms, not in attacking the invaders, but in avenging the defection of their friends. So the five kings of the chief Amorite cities came round Gibeon, intending to besiege and make an example of it.

For when people are turning to the Lord they are sure to be cruelly and fiercely opposed by the world which they are forsaking. It is well for them if, like the Gibeonites, they look to the right quarter for help.

LESSON XIII.

THE BATTLE OF BETH-HORON.

B.C. 1451.—JOSHUA x. 16—27.

And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand * from thy servants ; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us : for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us.

So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not : for I have delivered them into thine hand ; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.

Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night.

And the LORD discomfited † them before Israel, and slew them with a

* Be not slow, lose not a moment.

† Defeated.

great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon,* and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah.

And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died : they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.

Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon ;
And thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.
And the sun stood still,
And the moon stayed,
Until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies.

Is not this written in the book of Jasher †

So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man : for the LORD fought for Israel.

And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal.

But these five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah.

And it was told Joshua, saying, The five kings are found hid in a cave at Makkedah.

And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them :

And stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them ; suffer them not to enter into their cities : for the LORD your God hath delivered them into your hand.

And it came to pass, when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed, that the rest which remained of them entered into fenced ‡ cities.

And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace : none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel.

Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave.

And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon.

And it came to pass, when they brought out those kings unto Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them.

And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage : for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.

And afterwards Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on the trees : and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening.

* The place of caves.

† "The Just," a book of poetry.

‡ Fortified.

And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain until this very day.

COMMENT.—The Gibeonites sent in haste and terror. They had learnt what their new masters thought of a plighted word, and in them was their only hope. All the way to Gilgal they sent, and they were heard. Joshua called up his men and made them march all night—up, up the steep rugged way from the banks of Jordan to the hill of Gibeon, around which lay the five united armies, little dreaming of the sudden attack.

When Joshua thus fell on them they fled headlong up the steep stony hill before them, rising for four miles, to Upper Beth-horon, where perhaps they hoped to make a stand, but again they were defeated by the Israelites, and went with all the speed terror and dismay could give them—down, down the slope to Lower Beth-horon, while, as they struggled in the rocky road, a frightful hailstorm was sent by the Lord, with such huge masses of ice, that more fell under the blows from them than by the sword of Israel. It was the victory that above all gained the land for Israel, but the night would have enabled the enemy to steal away into their cities and rally again, and therefore it was that, on the hill of Beth-horon, Joshua called on the Lord to stay the sun, then over Gibeon to the east, and Ajalon ("the Vale of the Gazelles") to the west. And the sun obeyed. The day was lengthened till the five armies had been hunted down the hills, even to the flat plain of the sea-shore at Makkedah. There, worn out and exhausted, deprived of the darkness they hoped would hide them, the five kings crept into a large cave, with the mouth shaded by trees, and took shelter there, while Joshua returned to his camp at Gilgal, in the last light of that wonderful day that has never had its like.

When tidings were brought to him that the kings were found in the cave, he marched thither with his army. He made his warriors set their feet on the kings' necks as a token of victory, so that they might securely know and feel that they had the mastery over those they had heard of as so terrible. Then, after the usual doom of the Amorites, the kings were put to death. They were hung on trees

till night ; then, according to the command in Deuteronomy, that no corpse should hang all night, they were taken down and buried in their cave.

Joshua's command to the sun and moon is quoted by the writer of the book from Jasher ("the Book of the Just"), which seems to have been a poem on all the great and holy heroes of Israel. When astronomers first discovered that it is the earth that moves, not the sun, it was thought that this was impossible, because this command assumes the sun to move, and the doctrine was condemned as contrary to Scripture. More lately, since the earth has been found really to move, it has been said that the words are merely a piece of old poetry, not to be taken as fact. But this is clearly wrong. God's Word must be true ; and since He declares that the wonder came to pass, and we know He is all-powerful and all-wise, it does not seem worth while for us to concern ourselves as to how it was done. The sun is His, and He can do as He will with it.

LESSON XIV.

THE BATTLE OF LAKE MEROM.

JOSHUA xi. 1—16.

B.C. 1451.—*The battle of Beth-horon gave Joshua the key of southern Palestine. With the high ground of Gibeon in his power he could master the cities whence the five kings had come, in their first alarm, and all but Jebus, or Jerusalem, were immediately taken. The conquest was providentially rendered the easier for him by the fact that, during the forty years' wandering, Ramses III., king of Egypt, had made an incursion into Canaan, by the direct road which the Israelites had quitted for the desert of Paran, and had broken the strength of the Amorite nations. This king's ensign was a hornet, and it is now believed that the promise given to Moses, "I will send the hornet before you," refers to him, instead of to any plague of noxious insects, which was once supposed to be meant. These kings were chiefly Amorite, but there was another confederation forming against Joshua, among the Canaanite kings further north, in especial by him who dwelt at Hazor, or "the Fortress," near the reedy lake of Merom, not far from the source of the Jordan, and who like all his line, was called Jabin ("the Wise").*

And it came to pass, when Jabin* king of Hazor† had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph,

And to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth,‡ and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west,

And to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh.

And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many.

And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched§ together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough|| their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms.

And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire.

And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded.

But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn.

And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe.

As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.

So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same.

COMMENT.—The army that Jabin gathered against the Israelites was a very terrible one. It included all the tribes who dwelt about

* The Wise.

† The Fortress.

‡ The Lake of Gennesareth.

§ Set up their tents.

|| Cut the tendon of the leg.

the north course of the Jordan, round the two lakes of Merom and Chinneroth (the Gennesareth so dear to a Christian heart), at the foot of the mountains of Hermon and Lebanon, along the sea-coast below Mount Carmel, in the rich flats of Esdraelon, and even the Jebusites, who had, after the loss of their king Adonizedec, been able to hold out by the strong position of their city. Not only was the multitude greater than the Amorite host, but it appeared more terrible, for the Amorite mountaineers had fought on foot, whereas these dwellers in plains brought iron chariots, and battle horses, such as no Israelite had encountered since the horses of Pharaoh had "sunk like lead in the mighty waters" of the Red Sea.

Therefore there was a special encouragement given to Joshua. He was assured of victory, and moreover a command was given that the horses should be houghed—their legs injured so as to prevent them from being used again—that the Israelites might not be tempted to keep them, since, to a mountain race, cavalry would be weakness, not strength.

Moreover, as before, Joshua was not to wait to be attacked in his camp at Gilgal, but to fall on the enemy by surprise. Accordingly he marched to the place of assembly, where Jabin was gathering his forces, near the Lake of Merom, fell upon the united tribes, and drove them before him, hunting them westward as they fled, even to the shore of the Mediterranean, to the Phœnician city of great Zidon. Then returning, he took possession of each city, but burnt none except Hazor; and thus in two great battles, Beth-horon and Merom, had the forces of the nations of Canaan been routed, and the Israelites made masters of the Land of Promise.

Thus has our Joshua—our Lord and Saviour—won for us the victory over sin and death, and given us our inheritance, and yet only so that each must fight a battle for himself, but with the certainty that he must conquer, if he will.

LESSON XV.

THE LOT OF JUDAH.

JOSHUA xiv. 6—14; xv. 14—19.

B.C. 1444.—*Joshua, with the Ark, the priests, and the camp, still abode at Gilgal as their head-quarters. The two great battles had given the land to Israel, but it still remained for them to possess it, to take the towns and villages into their own hands, and to begin to sow corn, train vineyards, and live a settled life. Probably this was not a welcome change to men who had been used to rove freely with their tents, and who now seem to have levied contributions on the conquered country; besides, there was many a danger in the way. But a brave volunteer came forward to set the example.*

Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal : and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea.

Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land ; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart.

Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt : but I wholly followed the LORD my God.

And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God.

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness : and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.

As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me : as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in.

Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day ; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced : if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.

And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance.

Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel.

And Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak.

And he went up thence to the inhabitants of Debir : and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher.*

And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it : and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.

And it came to pass, as she came unto him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field : and she lighted off her ass ; and Caleb said unto her, What wouldest thou ?

Who answered, Give me a blessing ; for thou hast given me a south land ; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether† springs.

COMMENT.—The man who was most ready to carry out the will of God, and show how the land was to be possessed, was the oldest man in the camp except Joshua himself—namely, Caleb. When the time had come for some one to make a move, he came before Joshua and reminded him of the time, forty-five years before, when they two had, with the other ten spies, so long since dead, first seen the vale of Hebron, and brought home the huge grapes of Eshcol. Then, when they alone stood faithful and undaunted, Moses had sworn that the land they had trodden should be theirs, and Caleb now came to entreat the fulfilment of that promise. It was the sacred city of Hebron, the oak of Mamre, the favourite resting-place of Abraham, and the tomb of the patriarchs, that he asked for—a precious inheritance indeed ; and moreover, brave old man, another recommendation was that it must be wrested from the Anakim—the giants, twice the ordinary height of men, and the great dread of more cowardly hearts. As for himself, he was as strong as when, forty-five years before, he had been sent forth on the expedition. Such had been God's blessing on faithfulness. No wonder Joshua blessed him and granted his brave request. And not only did Caleb conquer his own lot out of the hands of the giants, but his tribe was inspired by his example, and settled themselves in the rough and hilly but fertile land that lay between Hebron and the Dead Sea. The coast of the Mediterranean was still occupied by the Philistines, who were not sentenced like the seven nations of Canaan ; but the fertile valleys and the terraced slopes trained with fruitful vines became the home

* The City of Books.

† Lower.

of Judah, which was thus the first settled of the tribes to the west of Jordan, and in a place which, if not so rich and lovely as other portions, was the best for brave and industrious men. Moreover, to encourage the spirit of conquest, Caleb promised his daughter to the man who should take Kirjath-sepher, "the City of Books," or perhaps of the oracles. This brave deed was achieved by his own nephew, Othniel, one of the most valiant men of Judah. It seems that the portion of Othniel and his bride, Achsah, lay to the south, and was therefore hot and dry, and Achsah therefore came to her father with a petition for a better watered piece of land. So he gave her the upper and the lower springs, at Debir and at Hebron. He conquered not for gain, but to do God's will.

[So Caleb is the pattern of the Christian—brave to go forth conquering and to conquer in the strength of his Lord, casting out the might of evil without fear or shrinking. And Achsah, as she kneels and prays for the springs of water, reminds us that none who thirst shall ask in vain for the Water of Life, the grace of the Holy Spirit.]

It was also fit that the lion tribe of Judah, the tribe that had the birthright, should be the first to win the settlement in the land, and should obtain the one portion of ground that had belonged to Abraham and to Isaac, the oak of Mamre, and the cave of Machpelah.

A few years later Judah and Simeon united, fought a great battle with the Canaanites and Perizzites (Judges i.), and made prisoner the Jebusite king Adonibezek, or "Lord of Lightning." His thumbs and toes were cut off, and he confessed that no less than seventy chiefs or kings grovelled for their food under his table in the same maimed state. He was treated as he had treated others. In those days the captive was either killed, enslaved, or maimed for his safe keeping. Nothing but Christianity has softened the lot of the prisoner of war. The lower part of his city was taken by Judah, and there he died; but the strength of the upper city of Jebus, or Jerusalem, was too great for them. To win Jerusalem was reserved for another great and holy typical hero—the Shepherd King.

LESSON XVI.

THE LOT OF JOSEPH.

B.C. 1444.—JOSH. xvi. 1—4 ; xvii. 13—18 ; xviii. 1 ; xxiv. 32.

And the lot of the children of Joseph fell from Jordan by Jericho, unto the water of Jericho on the east, to the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho throughout mount Beth-el,

And goeth out from Beth-el to Luz, and passeth along unto the borders of Archi to Ataroth,

And goeth down westward to the coast of Japhleti, unto the coast of Beth-horon the nether, and to Gezer : and the goings out thereof are at the sea.

So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance.

Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute ; but did not utterly drive them out.

And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto ?

And Joshua answered them, If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee.

And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us : and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Beth-shean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel.

And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power : thou shalt not have one lot only :

But the mountain shall be thine ; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down : and the outgoings of it shall be thine : for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong.

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.

And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver : and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.

COMMENT.—Just as the lot of Judah was fixed partly by inheritance from Abraham, partly by Caleb's appeal to the promise, so the lot of Joseph was marked out by the legacy of Jacob of his

field at Shechem, and by Joseph's own desire there to be buried. Probably Joshua, who was an Ephraimite himself, urged the settlement of his own kindred as Caleb had done that of Judah, though as ruler he forbore to ask any inheritance for himself. The mountain bull of Joseph, with the two horns of Ephraim and Manasseh, was to own the two long ranges of hill, of Ebal and Gerizim, where the Law was freshly written on the plastered precipice side, the hill called Mount Ephraim, bordering the Jordan and full of fine forests, and the grand open country to the north, so rich and fertile in corn, the choicest in all the land of Canaan, bordering the Jordan. Their border came down to Jericho; and with Ephraim settled to the south, and Manasseh to the north, their double inheritance was the widest and choicest that could be bestowed. Nevertheless they were not contented. They preferred dwelling in Mount Ephraim, leading the idle life of taking tribute from the Canaanites—namely, receiving a portion of their produce as their masters—to driving them out and working for themselves, and then they came to Joshua to complain that they had not enough land for such a great people.

To this Joshua answered, that all they had to do was to come down from Mount Ephraim, cut down the forest, and drive out the Perizzites and the giants. Of course they could. The same strength would be with them as had been with gallant old Caleb when he drove Arba the giant out of Hebron, and they had nothing to fear in making the broad vale of Jezreel their own. The iron chariots with their scythes need be nothing to them, for the Canaanites would come against them in vain. But, alas! the 78th Psalm, written long after, tells of their shame:—

The children of Ephraim, *armed*, and carrying bows,
Turned themselves back in the day of battle.

They never thoroughly purified their land of the old idolaters, and, by leaving the Canaanite fortresses unstormed, kept open a pathway from the fords of Jordan by which the enemy, many and, many a time, carried destruction into the Israelitish dwellings. It is very wonderful to see how the future courses of Judah and Ephraim, the chief tribes, and those belonging to the two faithful spies, were prepared by the conduct of these first conquerors.

Yet Ephraim, according to the blessing to Joseph, 'was at first the most favoured. Not only was the land infinitely richer and pleasanter, but besides that Joseph was buried beneath Ebal ("the Mount of Blessing"), in a tomb still pointed out, it was within the bounds of Ephraim that the "place which the Lord should choose" was fixed. The spot seems to have been the encampment to which Joshua removed when breaking up from Gilgal. It was not the old sanctuary of Bethel, for that was still held by the Canaanites, but it was on a piece of flat, yet raised ground, about twelve miles from Shechem. Perhaps when Joshua saw the Tabernacle rest there, and the curtains set up around the Ark, he yet hoped to place it at sacred Bethel ; but he could not rouse the spirit of his Ephraimites, and the Ark continued where it had been placed—the once-curtained courts were enclosed with stone walls instead of hangings ; still the roof was a veil of skins and woollen material, and the sanctuary became permanent, taking the name of Shiloh, or "Peace." Here the priests ministered day by day, and hither came the tribes which had already settled themselves, to bring their offerings and keep the feasts. These were Judah and Joseph ; the wives and children of Reuben, Gad, and the Gileadite half of Manasseh were settled in the giant cities of Bashan, on the other side Jordan, but their prime warriors still guarded the sacred camp ; and the other tribes, except that they did not eat manna, apparently lived somewhat the same life to which they had been so long accustomed, dwelling in tents, pasturing their flocks, and probably obtaining corn and other provisions from the inhabitants.

LESSON XVII.

THE DIVISION OF THE LAND.

B.C. 1444—JOSH. xviii. 2—10 ; xix. 49—51.

And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance.

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you ?

Give out from among you three men for each tribe : and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them ; and they shall come again to me.

And they shall divide it into seven parts : Judah shall abide in their coast on the south, and the house of Joseph shall abide in their coasts on the north.

Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God.

But the Levites have no part among you ; for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance : and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them.

And the men arose, and went away : and Joshua charged them that went to describe the land, saying, Go and walk through the land, and describe it, and come again to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the LORD in Shiloh.

And the men went and passed through the land, and described it by cities into seven parts in a book, and came again to Joshua to the host at Shiloh.

And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD : and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions.

* * * * *

When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them :

According to the word of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnath-serah in mount Ephraim : and he built the city, and dwelt therein.

These are the inheritances, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, divided for an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. So they made an end of dividing the country.

COMMENT.—After Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh were settled, Joshua still had to urge the other tribes to exert themselves ; and as their situation had not been fixed by circumstances like that of the tribes of Judah and Joseph, he sent out men, three from each of the seven tribes that were still unprovided for, to survey the country, and bring him back an exact record of the cities and villages. Then, under the eye of Joshua himself and Eleazar the priest, lots were cast before the Sanctuary at Shiloh for the seven portions into which the territory had been divided.

The first lot, apparently the first choice, was Benjamin's, and that tribe took a slip of land between Judah and Ephraim, full of

steep ranges of rounded hills, the scene of the great battle of Beth-horon, and including the hills of Gibeon, and a right to half Salem, the city of Melchizedek, whenever it could be won from the Jebusites by whose name it was called, for there Benjamin bordered upon Judah, and came very near to Bethlehem, his mother Rachel's burial-place, while Bethel, where Jacob had seen the angels, lay on his border towards Ephraim. It was a place of grand recollections, and the hills and passes were a fit home for the wolf of Benjamin.

Simeon's lot came next. Evidently the first places chosen were the nearest to the settled parts, for Simeon niched themselves to the south of Judah, in lands which that tribe was not yet numerous enough to occupy. Their crime and its punishment had made them few in number, and they had their inheritance within that of their more numerous and warlike brethren. Among their cities was, however, Beersheba, the well of Isaac, and always reckoned as the most southerly point in the Holy Land.

Zebulun, who came next, took a bolder venture, settling between the Mediterranean and the Lake of Chinneroth, in the fresh mountains afterwards called Galilee; and his brother Issachar, the strong ass, who loved rest, took the portion between him and Manasseh, sharing with the latter the fertile delights of the rich plains of Jezreel, but with the fords of Jordan in the rear, needing valiant watch and ward, such as Issachar did not always give. Then Asher's lot brought him the strip of Mediterranean coast beneath the rich and noble mountain of Carmel, in near neighbourhood to the great Phœnician merchant city of Zidon. Naphtali went north of Zebulun, between the lake and the great northern range of Hermon; and Dan, who had the seventh and last lot, obtained a part of the coast between Judah and the Mediterranean, and close upon the Philistines.

Lastly, as Joshua had reserved nothing for himself, the grateful tribes gave him a dominion in Mount Ephraim, called Timnath-serah, or "the portion of the Sun." The Levites had received no lot among the tribes. They were not to have a fixed territory, but single cities were appointed for them up and down among the other tribes, and three of these places were to be likewise cities of refuge—that is, a man who had killed a person by acci-

dent could find shelter there from the revenge of the kinsmen till the death of the high priest, when he might return home free from danger. The three were the sacred Hebron, Shechem, and Kedesh, the last being consecrated by Joshua's victory over the northern kings.

All these divisions had better be well looked out in the map, for much in the coming history depends on the boundaries of the tribes.

LESSON XVIII.

THE FAREWELL TO THE TRIBES BEYOND JORDAN.

B.C. 1444.—JOSH. xxi. 43—45 ; xxii. 1—9.

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers ; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.

And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers : and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them ; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand.

There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel ; all came to pass.

Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh,

And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you :

Ye have not left your brethren these many days until this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God.

And now the LORD your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them : therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan.

But take diligent heed* to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave† unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.

So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away : and they went unto their tents.

Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan : but unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren

* Be very careful.

† Hold fast.

on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them,

And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.

And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

COMMENT.—The conquest was as complete as it could be in the present state of Israel. Some cities of the enemy were indeed left, because there had been a command not to ruin more than could be occupied, "lest the beasts of the field increase upon you." Some, with less reason, had been left alone and put to tribute; but each tribe was settled in its lot, and held enough strong places on the hills to give security. The Canaanites were some living under tribute, some driven back on their borders, especially towards Zidon, and some had fled the country. The great Phœnician State of Carthage, on the North African coast, is believed to have been founded by these fugitives; and a Christian writer, under the Greek Emperor Justinian, reports that a column was there discovered with an inscription declaring that it had been raised by those who had fled from the face of "the robber Joshua, the son of Nun." A robber of course he seemed to them, but, as we well know, he was the faithful servant of God.

The time was come for the stout-hearted warriors of Reuben, Gad, and the Gileadite half of Manasseh to return to their homes, after the good service they had done. So Joshua blessed them, and gave them thanks for their brave support, saw that they had their full share of the silver, gold, iron, brass, and raiment, and sent them away to their chosen homes upon the eastern side of the Jordan, among the oaks and pastures of Bashan and the spice and balm-laden thickets of Gilead.

LESSON XIX.

THE ALTAR OF WITNESS.

B.C. 1444.—JOSHUA xxii. 11—31.

And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel.

And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.

And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest,

And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one was an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel.

And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead, and they spake with them, saying,

Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?

Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD,

But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, seeing ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.

Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD's tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God.

Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel,

The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,)

That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require* it;

And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel?

For the LORD hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the LORD: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the LORD.

Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice:

But that it may be a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD.

Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should so say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say again, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between us and you.

God forbid that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn this day from following the LORD, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the LORD our God that is before his tabernacle.

And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them.

And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, This day we perceive that the LORD is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the LORD: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD.

COMMENT.—The first thing the three tribes and a half did after they had crossed the Jordan on their way home was to join together and build up a great altar, after the pattern of that which had been built of unhewn stone at the holy place at Shiloh. Now, no law had been more often impressed on Israel than this: "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee." (Deut. xii. 13, 14.) And on the report of this altar beyond Jordan it was naturally supposed that

* May He punish us.

Reuben, Gad, and Gilead meant to set up a separate worship of their own, instead of coming up to Shiloh with their sacrifices to keep the three feasts of the year.

Therefore the other tribes prepared to go to war, to bring these tribes to a sense of their duty; but first they sent a deputation to examine into the matter and reason with them. There was a man from each tribe, led by the zealous Phinehas, who had so often shown his stern courage in upholding the cause of God; and their message reminded the tribes of the evil that had always befallen whosoever fell away from God, or presumed to follow his own will rather than the command of the Lord.

But, in answer, the chiefs of Reuben, Gad, and Gilead declared that nothing could be further from their minds than desertion of the sanctuary of their God. All they had intended was to raise a witness, to stand before their eyes and that of their children, reminding them of the true altar at Shiloh, and of the duty of repairing thither so as to keep up their fellowship with the other tribes, as well as to pay their due homage to God in the place in which he had chosen to set His name. This altar was not intended for any sort of sacrifice; it was nothing but a memorial. If it were placed there with any other intention, they called on God to punish them.

This answer was well-pleasing to Phinehas, the other deputies, and all the congregation, and the Altar of Witness remained on the bank of Jordan. Nothing was more distinctly taught God's people of old, than that religion is not to be a thing according to a man's fancy, but according to God's will, and that though prayer and praise may be offered to Him everywhere and at any time, yet for the more solemn acts of worship, which He has deigned to appoint as the means of approaching Him, He sets apart times and places, and binds us by rules, which we can only transgress at our peril.

LESSON XX.

JOSHUA'S WARNING.

B.C. 1427.—JOSHUA xxiii.

And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age.

And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age :

And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you ; for the LORD your God is he that hath fought for you.

Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward.

And the LORD your God, he shall expel * them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight ; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you.

Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left ;

That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you ; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them :

But cleave† unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day.

For the Lord hath driven out from before you great nations and strong : but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day.

One man of you shall chase a thousand : for the LORD your God ; he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.

Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God.

Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant‡ of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them :

Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you ; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges § in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth : and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all

* Force out.

† Hold to.

‡ What is left.

§ Whips.

the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you ; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.

Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you ; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them ; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you.

COMMENT.—The first years after the conquest of the Promised Land had been full of peace and rest. It was granted to the brave men who had been constant through all the trials of the wilderness to enjoy the rest that was a type of the great Rest above and beyond. Each tribe was living in its inheritance, governed by the heads of families, with the elders—as appointed by Moses—set over them, and judges in every city, who sat in the deep gateways to hear causes, with officers to execute their decrees ; and on great questions, such as affected the whole nation, the High Priest at Shiloh asked counsel of God through the Urim and Thummim. Yet still, in each tribe, many a walled city on a hill-top, many a valley shut in by rugged mountains, many a sea-coast town, was in the power of the old inhabitants ; and when the great and holy Joshua called on all the various men in office to assemble round him, apparently at his own house at Timnath-serah, it was to repeat his own great watchword, “ Be strong, and be courageous,” and to enforce on them what they had heard before from Moses, that friendship with these nations would be enmity to God. There was to be no intercourse. The very name of their gods was to be avoided ; no oaths were to be taken in those idol names ; above all, no marriages were to be made with heathens, but the Israelite must keep heedfully apart. So long as he did this, he was invincible. One man should chase a thousand—as verily befel more than one holy hero—and none should stand before their might. But once make friends with them, when Joshua should have “ gone the way of all the earth,” and they would become snares and traps—or nooses—first tempting and then punishing, until Israel should perish away off the good land that God had given them. As surely

as the Israelites who stood round their leader were in possession of all that God had ever promised them, so sure might they be that if they broke their promise to Him, they would forfeit their good land.

Our own great poet wrote that God is "just," and of our pleasant sins "makes whips to scourge us." These nations were to Israel just what our evil inclinations are to our souls. Our true Joshua, the Captain of our Salvation, has won the victory for us, and we have to keep the kingdom of God in our hearts for Him. But if we entertain and make friends, ever so little, with the Enemy of Holiness, we are falling into the snare, and by and by we shall feel the scourges and the thorns; and if we break our side of our covenant, "shall not God punish?"

LESSON XXI.

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL.

B.C. 1427.—JOSHUA xxiv. I, 14—31, 33.

And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

[And Joshua rehearsed the mighty acts the LORD had done for them, and said,]

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers* served that were on the other side of the flood,† or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;

For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed:

And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites

* The parents of Abraham.

† The Euphrates.

which dwelt in the land : therefore will we also serve the LORD ; for he is our God.

And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD : for he is an holy God ; he is a jealous God ; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.

And the people said unto Joshua, Nay ; but we will serve the LORD.

And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute* and an ordinance in Shechem.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us ; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us : it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.

And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.

And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel.

And Eleazar the son of Aaron died ; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in mount Ephraim.

COMMENT.—Once more Joshua assembled the people round him, and this time it was at Shechem, where the Ten Commandments still stood on the plastered rock, and where he had rehearsed the blessings and the curses. The great object of this last meeting was to teach the people that they must not trifle with God. They would have liked to please their fancies with whatever kind of worship fell in their way, perhaps paying a little attention to the presiding spirit of mountain or valley, or joining in such idol festivals as were amusing and lively, and yet all the time professing to be the Lord's own people.

This Joshua warns them is folly. They must choose whether

* Law.

they like the old idolatry of Mesopotamia, whence Abram was called, or again the Amorite gods, the Baalim or sun-gods, and the Ashtaroth or moon-goddesses, or whether they will verily serve the Lord. Half and half they cannot be. Let them choose. "But as for me and my house," says the great old warrior, "we will serve the Lord." His example and fervent speech evoked from all the answer that it was the Lord they would serve, for had He not done great things for them? Then, sadly, Joshua reminded them how hard, nay, impossible, it was to serve the Lord; to serve Him with other gods was no service at all, and the attempt was an iniquity He would not forgive. The Lord alone must be served, and in His own manner. Again the people promised, and Joshua bound them by the most solemn oaths, setting a stone up as a memorial under the oak, most probably the same tree under which Jacob buried the idols of Laban's household before joining his father's holy household.

This seems to have been the last public act of this great and holy man, who bore his Saviour's name and foreshowed His victories. He died and was buried at Timnath-serah, where a vast excavation in the rock has lately been discovered; and Eleazar the priest soon after died; but the effect of Joshua's example, in its noble faithfulness and simplicity, lasted throughout the generation which had grown up under him.

No one thought of picking and choosing his religion from what he in his own mind and heart thought suitable to his notions of God, or what excited or pleased his fancy. The Israelites believed what God told them through His Word and His priests, and they worshipped in the Sanctuary where He had set His name. Just in the same way we are bound to serve the Lord as He has taught by the Scripture and the Church, and with our whole hearts—for He is still a jealous God.

LESSON XXII.*

MICAH'S IDOLATRY.

B.C. 1406.—JUDGES xvii. ; xviii. 1—10.

And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me ; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image : now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

Yet he restored the money unto his mother ; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten† image : and they were in the house of Micah.

And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim,‡ and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place : and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou ? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

And the Levite was content to dwell with the man ; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

And Micah consecrated the Levite ; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

In those days there was no king in Israel : and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in ; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts,

* Not for the younger readers.

Melted.

† Little figures or charms.

men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it ; and they said unto them, Go, search the land : who, when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite : and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

And the priest said unto them, Go in peace : before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure ; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing ; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man.

And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol : and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them : for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good : and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land : for God hath given it into your hands ; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

COMMENT.—The history here begun is taken from the later chapters of the Book of Judges, but it is plain that it was there added as a kind of note, or appendix, and that the events took place soon after the settlement of the land, in the lifetime of the generation who came in with Joshua.

It is a very important story, as showing from how small and apparently trifling a seed of disobedience a gigantic tree of evil may spring, casting its shadow over a whole land. The wilfulness of one obscure woman, who preferred her own way of worshipping to that which God had commanded, was the beginning of that sin which beguiled no less than ten of the tribes of Israel, and led to their utter and total ruin.

For it was a wilful act. It could not have been ignorance, for her abode was in Mount Ephraim, where Joshua spent his later years, and near at hand to the Sanctuary at Shiloh and the Ten Commandments engraven at Shechem ; but she chose to shut her eyes to the command against serving God under the form

of any image, and her ears to the repeated injunction against dedicating any place except the one centre of worship at Shiloh, and, in preparation for her self-chosen scheme of religion, hoarded up eleven hundred shekels' weight of silver.

When she found that this treasure had been stolen, she broke out into such curses on the unknown thief, that her son Micah, who had really taken the sum, was terrified, and confessed to her. She at once took back the curse and turned it into a blessing, and then she told him what her intention had been in laying by the silver. Micah at once came into the project, and used the silver to make a "molten image" (probably a calf, as it is the same word as is used for the calf at Horeb), a graven image, and teraphim, or little amulets like those that Jacob had taken away from his household; likewise an ephod, rich with precious stones, gold, and embroidery, such as that on which the High Priest wore his breast-plate. They do not seem to have meant to set up absolute rival gods, but just to mix up together the favourite fashions of Israel, Canaan, Egypt, and Syria, and to profess to serve the Lord—just what Joshua had declared to be impossible. At first Micah made one of his own sons a priest, though he was of the tribe of Ephraim; but there was no one to hinder him, since there was no king, no central government, and every one thought for himself.

Soon it happened that a young Levite came in Micah's way, wandering about in search of a home where he might be maintained, and he accepted Micah's offer of food, clothing, lodgings, and payment of ten shekels a month for conducting this most disobedient and unholy worship. And it appears from the next chapter that this apostate Levite was Jonathan, the son of Gershon, and the grandson of Moses himself! What a fall! The Jewish scribes were so ashamed that they tried changing the letters and making the name Manasseh, but the oldest and best manuscripts witnessed to this most shameful degradation.

About this time the tribe of Dan, whose borders on the sea-coast were very narrow, needed more space; so they sent five men to look for a place beyond the bounds of all the other tribes, where they might form a settlement. These men came on their way to Mount Ephraim; they knew the voice of Jonathan the Levite,

and turning in to claim Micah's hospitality, they desired that Jonathan should consult the Ephod on their behalf, in imitation of the real High Priest; and this, either in profaneness or superstition, he did, and promised them a favourable journey. They went on far to the north, beyond Galilee, almost to the sources of the Jordan, and there fixed their eyes on the city of Laish, in the midst of a rich, well-watered country at the foot of the Anti-Libanus mountains. It was settled by a colony of the Zidonians, the great merchant city on the sea-coast, and was full of quiet, prosperous, unsuspicious inhabitants, too far off to be succoured from their mother city, and therefore likely to be an easy conquest. With these tidings the five spies returned.

LESSON XXIII.

THE FOUNDATION OF DAN.*

B.C. 1406.—JUDGES xviii. 11—31.

And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed† with weapons of war.

And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim,‡ in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan§ unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjath-jearim.

And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.

And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him.

And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war.

* Not for the younger ones.

† Provided.

‡ The City of the Wood.

§ The Camp of Dan.

And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage* before them.

And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?

And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?

And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.

And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first.

And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

COMMENT.—On the report of the spies, six hundred men with their families and cattle set forth from the cities belonging to the tribe of Dan, and passed through the territory of Judah, after which they climbed up Mount Ephraim. The five spies told them of the idolatrous shrine in the house of Micah, and these lawless and violent men decided on carrying off these objects of worship to

* Waggon.

set up in their own colony. So, while the band of armed men held the Levite in conversation at the gate, the five spies crept in and stole the images and the ephod; and when the Levite perceived what they were doing, they persuaded him to go with them, since he would be a greater man as priest to a whole city and settlement than to only one household.

Then they hastened on, putting the women, children, cattle, and goods in front, and the armed men keeping in the rear, prepared for resistance. Soon Micah and the men of the village around followed them; but they were too strong for him, and advised him in a half mocking, half friendly manner, not to complain too loudly, "lest angry fellows run on thee, and thou lose thy life;" so Micah was robbed as he himself had robbed his mother. It was a blessed loss to both if it sent them back to the sole acceptable worship of the Invisible God, without visible tokens, at Shiloh.

Meantime the Danite invaders proceeded, fell suddenly upon Laish, where the people, after the Zidonian custom, lived quiet and at ease in the midst of beautiful well-watered gardens, in a park-like country. They took the place by surprise, nor was there any possibility of a rescue from Zidon; they slew all the inhabitants, and built up a new city, to which they gave the name of Dan, after the father of their tribe. It was always the northern point of the land of Israel, as Beersheba was the southern, and "from Dan even to Beersheba" was always the expression for the whole length of the country.

It was beautifully placed on a hill, close to the delicious pool of clear water that forms one source of the Jordan, and whence could be seen the cool sheet of water forming Lake Merom, with Mount Hermon resting behind—a delicious home, where "Dan might judge his people."

But here it was that the idols of Micah were set up by the fallen and ambitious Levite. Here the grandson of Moses (for so all critics believe "Manasseh" should be read) conducted a self-willed mockery of devotion, in opposition to that carried on by the seed of Aaron; and this false consecration rendered Dan ever after a place of unholy idolatry, tainting the whole of the northern tribes; and Dan, the first of the tribes to set up a regular system of idolatry, the one tribe that is not named when St. John saw the sealing

of the chosen who should be gathered into the kingdom of heaven.

INTER-CHAPTER. THE WOLF-TRIBE OF BENJAMIN.

(Not for the Younger Ones.)

A sad and wild history, given likewise in the end of the Book of Judges, must not quite be passed over, because it greatly affected the fate of one of the tribes. In Gibeah, a town belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, the wicked and inhospitable inhabitants caused the death of a poor woman who had sojourned a night in the place. All the Israelites were indignant, and demanded that the wicked city should be destroyed, and the cruel men thereof put to death; but the rest of Benjamin, instead of thinking about right and justice, chose to stand by their own tribe, the Wolf of Benjamin, and would not give the guilty up for punishment, but rather fight against the whole of the other tribes, trusting to their craggy hills and likewise to their skill in arms. They had among them 700 men who could use the sling—a strip of leather for casting stones as well with the left hand as with the right—and thus could strike the enemy where he did not expect it, and the whole number of fighting men was 26,000. With these they chose to defend the bad cause of Gibeah. Their obstinacy so enraged the rest of the Israelites, that they swore an oath to punish them, root and branch, and that no man of another tribe should give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite. Their anger was just, but their wrath was cruel, and their oath presumptuous; it was taken without repairing to Shiloh, that Phinehas, the high priest, might ask God's will. However, they did ask of the Lord who should first attack Benjamin, and Judah was named. But Judah met no success; the fierce Benjamites sallied out of Gibeah and killed great numbers of them. They deserved chastising for their presumption, and this was given through the Benjamites; but they had to go on and keep their oath, though on the second day they were again defeated. On the third day's battle, by a stratagem like that at Ai, the Benjamites were drawn away from Gibeah, surrounded, and cut off; and then ensued a most horrible vengeance. The Wolf-tribe was treated like the Canaanites, and ravaged throughout—man, woman, child, and

even beast slain, in obedience to the hasty vow ; all but 600 of the strongest men, who made their way to the rock Rimmon, or "of the Pomegranates," a steep, conical, chalk hill, with deep caverns in it; and there for four months they held out, while all the land around was laid desolate.

But when this deadly work was done, the Israelites reflected on the effect,—the twelfth tribe, old Jacob's darling, would drop out of the reckoning of the tribes; and they wept when they met at Shiloh for a festival and the place of Benjamin was empty. There were only the 600 left, not a woman nor a child ; and every one was bound by an oath not to allow his daughter to marry one of them, so that with them the tribe would be extinct. Still, it was not of the Lord they sought counsel, but of themselves. They reckoned whether any place had failed to send its men to the muster against Benjamin, and they found that Jabesh-Gilead—far out beyond Jordan—the Gileadite capital, had done so. This omission they ferociously requited, by sending an expedition to destroy the place and the dwellers therein, all but the maidens; and having captured 400 virgins out of their desolated homes, they called the Benjaminites on the Rock of Pomegranates to come peaceably down, take the wives thus provided for them, and return to their cities.

Still there were 200 not provided for, and in order that they should obtain wives without a breaking of the oath, advice was given them that when the great feast of the vintage came at Shiloh, and the maidens of the place came out to dance in the vineyards, they should lie in wait, and suddenly break out upon the festivity, each one securing for himself a young girl ! This strange device was carried out, and Benjamin again took its place among the tribes; but the effect of this frightful reduction in the numbers was, that Judah overflowed into the mountains of Benjamin, and the villages were inhabited by persons of both tribes. Another effect of all the weaker and less valiant having been destroyed was, that this little tribe seemed to have a temper strong as steel, and often as stubborn.

LESSON XXIV.

THE ANGEL AT BOCHIM.

B.C. 1400.—JUDGES ii. 1—5, 11—23.

And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swear unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

And they called the name of that place Bochim,* and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

* * * * *

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal † and Ashtaroth. ‡

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Whithersoever they went out, the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and they were greatly distressed.

Nevertheless the LORD did not drive them out of the land.

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And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them ; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel ; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice ;

I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died :

That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.

Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily ; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

COMMENT.—This book of the Holy Scripture is a collection of the lives and exploits of the great men whom God raised up from time to time to lead and rescue His people. The word Judge—as we now have it in English—means one whose office it is to weigh causes and do justice between man and man, or to try criminals ; but this does not express the character of the men here described. They were rather heroes, who, having led the people of Israel or of some tribe to battle and victory, were then treated as heads and chiefs, with power to call out the warriors of the tribe in case of need. The Phœnicians of Carthage had governors much like these Judges, who were known to the Romans as *suffetes*.

The first chapter of the Book of Judges tells what remnants of the idolatrous nations each tribe failed to drive out, and then ensues that wonderful Divine rebuke, when the Angel of the Lord came from Gilgal, where Israel had passed the Jordan and renewed the covenant, and appearing to the people, probably near Shiloh, at some solemn assembly, gave them warning of the consequence of their slackness. There was no longer to be on their side the miraculous strength that made no man able to stand before them, but the hostile people would remain, to be the temptation and the punishment that had been foretold. The supernatural grace had been neglected—it was now taken away.

Just so, if we do not fight with our bad habits in the fresh grace of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion, there will be these besetting sins, not uprooted, but left to be our snares and our traps for life, kept *perhaps* from being our destruction, but only by a far more trying and perpetual watch than if we had resisted and

conquered them in the freshness of our youth, while our character was still forming itself.

The people wept so bitterly at the warning, that the place was called Bochim (or "weeping"). It is the place of repentance, the vale of Baca, or of weeping, that the good man passes through in the 84th Psalm. It is not quite clear whether this angel appeared before or after the death of Joshua; at any rate it was before the generation had passed away who overlived him, and before the corruption foretold had begun. The weeping and sacrifice of Bochim were so far accepted that God forgave these men for their faint-hearted indolence, but the whole country was in a worse state in consequence of their neglect, and their children suffered for it. Just so those who do not destroy their evil habits early must be in a much lower state of holiness all their lives than those who do.

The rest of the chapter is really a sketch in short of the whole Book to come—the sin, the repentance, the deliverance, the relapse.

Baal was the great Sun-god worshipped by most Eastern nations. His name meant "lord," and was added to the names of other gods. With the addition of *im*, the Hebrew plural, the word (Baalim) stood for all the Canaanite gods. Astarte (or Ashtaroth) was the goddess of the Moon, and her name was also applied to all other goddesses. Her worship was very tempting, as it had to do with the joy at the awakening of spring, and the women of Israel were continually tempted by it.

LESSON XXV.

DEBORAH AND BARAK.

JUDGES iv. 1—17.

B.C. 1296.—*The first great chastisement of the Israelites was one of the inroads of the kings of Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates. A king called in the Book of Judges*

Chusan-rishathaim conquered the country, but after eight years the brave Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, took the command of Israel, delivered the country from the enemy, and so ruled Israel that it was kept from idolatry, and had rest.

But after Othniel's death there was another falling away, and this was punished by an invasion of the Moabites, from the other side of the Dead Sea, with the Ammonites and Amalekites. They overran the southern tribes, and forced them to pay a tribute for eighteen years, until Ehud the Benjamite, being sent to carry the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab, contrived to kill him, and in the confusion that followed freed the country for another period of rest, only broken by an attack from the Philistines in the south, when an Israelite named Shamgar, with no better weapon than the iron spike used for driving oxen, slew six hundred enemies.

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kadesh-naphthali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaïm, which is by Kedesh.

And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots

of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

COMMENT.—Those Canaanites whom Joshua had conquered at Lake Merom rose up to be the means of punishing Israel. Their king seems to have been always called Jabin; and when the chariots of iron that Joshua had not feared were brought against Israel, it was to destroy and subdue them. For twenty years the Canaanite general Sisera was a cruel enemy to the northern tribes and those who dwelt in the great plain of Jezreel, which lay open to the chariots and horses.

At last, a holy woman, to whom had fallen the task of guiding Israel, was, in answer to their repentant prayer, inspired to waken their spirit. She dwelt far to the south, by the grave of Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, and she was herself called Deborah, which means "a bee." She sent a messenger to a Naphtalite warrior named Barak, or "lightning," and told him that God bade him gather together the men of the northern tribes, his own with Zebulun and Issachar, to Mount Tabor, a flat-topped, lonely mountain, an offshoot from the hills of Galilee, but standing separate. There the Lord would bring Sisera and his army, to Kishon, the river below, and give victory to Israel at Kishon. Barak heard, but he declared he could not undertake the task unless Deborah would go with him. We do not know whether he wanted her presence to bring the warriors to rally round him, or whether he really doubted his own power without her. Either way, it was a failure in that unquestioning obedience which showed full trust and faith in the Lord who promised victory, and Deborah was inspired to reply

that though he should have his request he would lose the full honour of the day, for Sisera would fall a prey to a woman.

Thus Deborah and Barak gathered their forces from these three tribes, with others from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, among whom Deborah lived. They were on Mount Tabor when Sisera, hearing of this uprising of the subject people, went with his nine hundred chariots to punish them, and came round the foot of the hill by Zaanaïm, always a Canaanite town. At the fitting moment the signal was given; down rushed the Israelites; the enemy was surprised and scattered; a storm came furiously down on them; all was confusion and despair; the Kishon swelled with the rain and swept away the fugitives, and Sisera, as the only way of escape, left his chariot and fled on foot towards the black tents of one of the wandering tribes of the desert which were encamped in the plain.

LESSON XXVI.

JAEL AND SISERA.

B.C. 1296.—JUDGES iv. 18—24; v. 1, 2, 24—31.

And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk,* and gave him drink, and covered him.

Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent,† and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

* A goatskin filled with buttermilk

† Wooden peg for fastening the cords.

So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel,
When the people willingly offered themselves.

* * * * *

Blessed above women

Shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be,

Blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

He asked water, and she gave him milk ;

She brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

She put her hand to the nail,

And her right hand to the workman's hammer ;

And with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head,

When she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

At her feet he bowed, he fell,

He lay down :

At her feet he bowed, he fell :

Where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

The mother of Sisera looked out at a window,

And cried through the lattice,

Why is his chariot so long in coming ?

Why tarry the wheels of his chariots ?

Her wise ladies answered her,

Yea, she returned answer to herself,

Have they not sped ? have they not divided the prey ;

To every man a damsel or two ;

To Sisera a prey of divers * colours,

A prey of divers colours of needlework,

Of divers colours of needlework on both sides,

Meet for the necks of them that take the spoil ?

So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD :

But let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.

COMMENT.—Heber the Kenite was the descendant of Hobab, or Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, and of that Reuel, the brother of Ziporah, who had been a guide to the Israelites in the wilderness. There was still room in Canaan for pastoral wanderers, and these Kenites, themselves descendants of Abraham, roamed there with their herds and tents. At Zaanaim, not far from Lake Merom, the tents of these Kenites were pitched, when, fleeing from the lost battle, the once proud and violent Sisera came hurrying, not as the guest of

* Different.

the chieftain, but to crave a refuge in the women's tents, which would be sacred from the pursuer.

At first Jael received him hospitably: she invited him in, refreshed his thirst with buttermilk, and threw a mantle over him to conceal him. Then, as it would seem, a sudden impulse came on her. She knew that Sisera was the deadly enemy of Israel, and therefore of God. She took one of the long wooden pegs that pinned the hair-ropes of the tent into the ground, and with the hammer or mallet used for driving it in she smote Sisera on the temple. He partly rose as he saw her coming, then, astounded, fainting, fell at her feet, while she drove the nail with supernatural force through his head into the ground. And when Barak in his pursuit reached the encampment, she called him into her tent to see the man whom he sought lying dead with the nail through his temples.

So Barak's faith, which was strong enough to be praised in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews, but yet failed in that he needed Deborah to go with him, was rewarded by the victory, but not by the individual overcoming of Sisera. Then follows the great inspired song in which Deborah, Barak, and the conquering army gave thanks and celebrated their deliverance.

The deed of Jael is thus honoured by an inspired prophetess. It was done in the cause of God, and was accepted by Him; therefore it becomes us not to speak rash words about it. We must remember that these Canaanites were under a special doom, and that their death had been enjoined as has never been the case with any other people, and therefore that this was an exceptional act of obedience. Sisera, looked at as a type, is the power of Satan, to be battled with and slain even by the weakest as well as the strongest, and it is thus that Jael becomes an example of letting no pretext lead to the laying aside of enmity to him.

Deborah's song recounted the sufferings of Israel, when travellers could not travel on the high roads for fear of the enemy, but had to steal along by mountain paths and secret tracks, and how the archers beset them at the wells—how, too, there was scarcely a weapon left among all the thousands of Israel, for the enemy took them away. Then she blesses the tribes that came to the war, and blames such as hung back; and she tells how the skies

themselves and the river Kishon fought against Sisera, when it swept the chariots and horsemen away in its swollen flood.

Had Deborah ever thought she was to be the woman into whose hands Sisera was to be sold? If so, she was able to set aside all thoughts of self, and freely bless and praise Jael as having been the deliverer of God's people, and thus cast in her lot with them—describing his fall and death with terrible minuteness.

And what Sisera's death delivered the Israelites from is seen in the picture then drawn of Sisera's mother watching for the return of her son. A fierce, pitiless woman she is shown. "Have they not sped?" she says; "have they not found the spoil?" What was that spoil to be? "To every man a damsel or two"—a Hebrew girl, torn away from her burning home and slaughtered family, to be the slave of the savage Canaanite—and for Sisera the richly embroidered garments so eagerly sought after! Whether Sisera's mother was a real character, or only one called up by Deborah's poetry, we do not know; but we see here the evidence of the miseries that were inflicted by the conquerors, who were all around the Israelites, ready to fall on them whenever they broke their covenant.

LESSON XXVII.

THE CALL TO GIDEON.

B.C. 1256.—JUDGES vi. 1—23.

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east,* even they came up against them;

* The Arabs.

And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

And there came an angel* of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose

* Messenger.

up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O LORD God ! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee ; fear not : thou shalt not die.

COMMENT.—Another falling away brought another punishment. This time it came through the Midianites, the degenerate descendants of Abraham, from whom the Kenites had separated when they cast in their lot with Israel. They were the same people as had combined with Balak to beset the Israelites, and who had tempted them to the unholy worship of Baal Peor—wild, ferocious children of the desert, whose delight was in robbery and pillage. No sooner had the crops been sown throughout the broad plains of Ephraim and Manasseh, than across the Jordan they came in swarms, with the Amalekites and Arabs—all whom we now call Bedouins—with their hosts of cattle and camels, which browsed down the growing wheat as fast as it came up, and left the land as if the locusts had passed over it, the tribe moving their black tents as each place was desolated. Such of the people as they caught they slew or carried away to sell for slaves. The Israelites made themselves caves and hiding-places to flee to in the hill-sides ; but when they came forth from them, it was to find their fields laid bare, no sustenance left for man or beast. So it went on, from the bank of the Jordan to Gaza on the Mediterranean coast, for seven whole years. The people cried unto the Lord, and He sent a prophet, who reproved them sternly for their idolatry, but gave them no promise of help. Repentance had to come first.

Yet in God's mercy a deliverance was preparing. In the portion of Manasseh, at a place called Ophrah, among the hills, dwelt a chief called Joash, a descendant of Abiezer, grandson of Manasseh. He had not kept clear of the prevailing sin, for he had close to his house an altar to Baal, with one of the trees or wooden emblems of Ashtaroth ; and he had suffered for it, for all his tall princely-looking sons except one had been slain in an inroad of the two Midianite chiefs, Zebah and Zalmunna. That one

remaining son, Gideon, was threshing out the little corn that was left them. He durst not as in peaceful times carry the sheaves to a flat open threshing-floor of rock on the top of a hill, where the chaff would be blown away by the wind while the grain was trodden out by the feet of oxen trampling up and down knee-deep in straw. This would have been in full view, and the enemy would have swept it off at once. So he had taken his sheaves into the middle of a vineyard, where no one would think of looking so early in the spring, and was beating out the grain with a flail, in the stone trough where grapes were trodden out, when he beheld, sitting under an oak, One who spoke to him, saying, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

Gideon asked, sadly, how could the Lord be with those who were suffering such misery? Then the Divine messenger, who is here called the Lord, looked on him, as if to give him strength by that look, and bade him go in this might now bestowed on him, and save his people from their enemies. Overpowered, Gideon objected that his father's family was of no note, and that even among them he was the least; thinking, no doubt, of those brethren who had "each resembled the children of a king." He was told in return that he should smite the Midianites as if they were but one man. Gideon appears to have had little training in the Divine teachings of Israel, and though he had much power of faith, he, like Moses before him, begged for some token by which to be certified that he had indeed a message from Heaven. He entreated the Messenger to remain while he fetched a present. Such a gift would have been suitable had the Messenger been a prophet, for it consisted of a hastily-dressed kid, with the broth, and unleavened cakes of bread; but, instead of tasting them, the Messenger bade him lay the flesh and bread on the rock, and pour out the broth over it, like a meat and drink offering. Then, touching the rock with the staff in His hand, the Holy One brought fire out of the rock to consume the sacrifice, and therewith departed from the sight of Gideon, who remained struck with awe, believing at first that he must die at so great a sight as that Presence. But, as it seems, a voice came back to him, saying, "Peace be unto thee." They were the very words that made the Apostles able to bear the awful but glad

appearance of their risen Lord ; and there is little doubt that it was the same Lord, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Angel or Messenger of the Covenant, who thus came to Gideon — not one of the created angels. And His miracle not only proved to Gideon the reality of the appearance, but showed him how God could bring fire out of the rock, power and strength out of the most unlikely place, to consume the enemy. Does it not show us how Christ makes the fire of love and zeal to break forth by the touch of His Rod, the Cross?

LESSON XXVIII.

THE SIGNS GRANTED TO GIDEON.

B.C. 1256.—JUDGES vi. 24—40.

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it *Jehovah-shalom**: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, and the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove† that is by it :

And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in order, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him : and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die : because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.

And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst

* The Lord is peace.

† Properly the wooden image or tree of Ashtaroth.

it is yet morning : if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal,* saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

But the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet ; and Abi-ezer was gathered after him.

And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh ; who also was gathered after him : and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali ; and they came up to meet them.

And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

Behold, I will put a fleece† of wool in the floor ; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

And it was so : for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once : let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece ; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

And God did so that night : for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

COMMENT.—Gideon's first act, when he found himself left alone, was to heap up the stones into an altar, where the Holy One had disappeared, and to call it "The Lord is peace," in memory of those parting words to him, and in hope of the future. Worshipping Baal had brought war and misery. The Lord is peace. The altar was still standing when the Book of Judges was written, probably in Samuel's time.

A first effort in God's cause was required of Gideon before his great work began. He was to purify his father's house of idols, and to consecrate it again to the Lord. Though not a priest or Levite by birth, the Lord appointed him on this one special occasion to act as priest. He was to break down Baal's altar, and destroy Ashtaroth's wooden image or tree, then raise an altar to God on this rock—not the rock whence the fire had come, where the altar Jehovah-Shalom stood, but in the fortress of Ophrah, with all set in order. Then he was to take two bullocks, one seven years old, just the time that Israel had been in servitude, sacrifice one of them and burn it upon the altar, using as fuel the wood of the

* Let Baal plead.

† A sheepskin with the wool on.

idolatrous pillar or image. The other bullock was to live. This was like the case of the bird set free at the purifying from leprosy, and, like this, it signifies that there is One who dies that mankind may be set free. One is slain ; the other is therefore pardoned.

Such a daring attack on the superstition of the place was verily a proof that Gideon was "a mighty man of valour." Even he could only carry it out by night. And when the men of Ophrah found what was done, they demanded him of his father to put him to death ; but Joash upheld his son, saying, if Baal were a god he might plead his own cause—that is, if he were really a god, he could avenge the ruin of his altar for himself, without their doing so for him ; and in honour of this deed he called Gideon by the name "Jerubbaal," meaning, "Let Baal plead, let Baal take care of himself."

The Midianites and Amalekites began to gather for another of their barbarous inroads, and brought their countless tents into the rich valley of Jezreel. The Holy Spirit of Might was sent to Gideon ; he sounded a trumpet, collected his own kinsmen, sons of Abiezer, with the bravest men of the nearest tribes, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali : but the venture seemed so great for an inexperienced leader to fall on these terrible foes—marauders and warriors from infancy—that Gideon entreated that God would mark him out as chosen to save Israel, by some visible sign that might give his army confidence in him—just as the miracles of the rod and leprous hand had been, as it were, Moses' credentials. The signs were of Gideon's own choosing, and show the simplicity of the peasant called from threshing his wheat. One night he laid out a fleece of wool on the floor, namely, the threshing-floor on the hill, most likely the muster-place of his army ; and on that night, when not a drop of dew fell elsewhere, all had filled the fleece, so that in the morning he wrung out a bowlful of water from it. Then, to show that there was no peculiar quality in the wool to attract all the dew in the atmosphere, the next night the fleece lay dry, and the whole of the grass around was silvery with dew.

Most likely the recollection of this miracle was in the mind of the Psalmist who sung—

He shall come down as the rain into a fleece of wool,
Even as the drops that water the earth.

(Psalm lxxii. 6.)

And the gentle, silent dew is always a type of God's Holy Spirit refreshing the soul.

The dew of heaven is like Thy grace,
It steals in silence down ;
But where it lights, the favoured place
By richest fruits is known.

Thus Gideon's fleece was like the people of Israel,—at first steeped in the grace of the favour of God, while all other nations were left bare and unwatered ; but afterwards, alas, by their own fault, dry and dreary, even while the earth is becoming “full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

LESSON XXIX.

THE MIDIANITE'S DREAM.

B.C. 1256.—JUDGES vii. 1—15.

Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod :* so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand ; and there remained ten thousand.

And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many ; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there : and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee ; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

So he brought down the people unto the water : and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself ; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.

And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth,

* Trembling.

were three hundred men : but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand : and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets : and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men : and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host ; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host :

And thou shalt hear what they say ; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.

And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude ; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel : for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise ; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

COMMENT.—Gideon, or as he was also called Jerubbaal, had his camp on the slope of the broad valley of Jezreel, with the hill of Gilead behind him—a hill probably so named by the western Manassites in honour of their kinsmen in the land of Gilead on the further side of Jordan. Thirty-two thousand men had gathered round the new leader ; but one great need was to bring the people back to the sense that they depended on God, and not on their own numbers. Therefore the proclamation commanded by Moses (Deut. xx. 8) was made, that whosoever was faint or feeble of heart should return home ; and no less than twenty-two thousand, more than two-thirds of his army, did so. Ten thousand remained, and there were a hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites. Still there were too many, and the Lord commanded Gideon to separate them in the following manner. He was to take them down to the spring—thenceforth called the Spring of

Trembling, probably in remembrance of the departure of the twenty-two thousand fearful ones. There he was to watch each man's manner of drinking, set aside those who took up water in the hollow of their hand and lapped it with their tongue, standing, and reject those who knelt down for a long draught from the pool. Such little things show what the man is. These eager drinkers were the self-indulgent ones ; those who but snatched a little without giving themselves up to the luxury of the cool draught, had the true, hardy, trustworthy spirit. There were only three hundred of these, but each of them was worth a thousand of those who had gone home, and Gideon's enterprise needed men few and brave rather than many and weak. He had obeyed ; but as with this tiny band he looked down from Mount Gilead on the locust-like host of Midian, and their yellow camels like sand covering the country, he needed further strength, and the Lord gave it to him, by bidding him creep down in the dark to the outskirts of the enemy's camp and listen. He listened as he stood beside one of the black tents, and heard a Midianite tell his dream to his comrade, how a round cake of barley bread had tumbled into the camp, and rolling along had overthrown a whole tent and laid it flat ! The Bedouin successors of these Midianites often leave the peasants of Palestine no food but such bread, and then deride them for eaters of barley. Most likely it was so with these men, for the listener at once answered that this terrible piece of bread could be no other than the sword of Gideon, into whose hands the Divine power had delivered Midian. Both dream and interpretation were of course inspired by God for the discomfiture of Midian and the encouragement of the Manassites, and with a joyful and resolute heart Gideon returned secure of victory.

[And are not we sure of victory ? for is it not the Bread of Life in whose strength we go forth to defeat the hosts of Satan ?]

LESSON XXX.

THE TORCHES AND PITCHERS.

B.C. 1256.—JUDGES vii. 16—25 ; viii. 1—9.

And Gideon divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps* within the pitchers.

And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise : and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch ;† and they had but newly set the watch :‡ and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal : and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

And they stood every man in his place round about the camp : and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host : and the host fled to Beth-shittah§ in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah,|| unto Tabbath.

And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.

And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters¶ unto Beth-barah** and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan.

And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb†† and Zeeb ;‡‡ and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites ? And they did chide with him sharply.

* Torches ; that is, sticks of resinous wood lighted.

† Changed the guard. § The House of Acacias.

‡ Watch the fords. ** The House of Passage.

† About ten at night.

‡ The Meadow of the Dance.

†† The Raven. ‡‡ The Wolf.

And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?

God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated* toward him, when he had said that.

And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.

And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him.

And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

COMMENT.—Gideon came back encouraged and inspired with the means of surprising the unguarded camp. He bade each of his three hundred resolute comrades take a trumpet, probably a ram's horn, and a torch—a branch of resinous wood from the forest—lighted, but hidden in an earthen pitcher. Thus they crept silently in the darkness down the hill to the verge of the tents, and then at the signal every trumpet was blown, every pitcher was broken, and the enemy woke from their sleep to the wild bray of the trumpets on all sides and the glare of the torches. Up they started in terror and confusion, not knowing who attacked them, whether the Amalekites or the Israelites, and in their blind rage and fright they fell on each other; each man's sword was turned against his fellow, many slew one another, and the rest broke up their camp, and hurried, as fast as their numbers would allow, to the south-east, to cross the Jordan and return to their own desert around the Dead Sea.

All the men of Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh, the ten thousand brave and the twenty-two thousand faint-hearted, rose up to pursue them, slay the men, and seize the cattle that straggled in their flight through the land of Ephraim. They would have to

* Lessened.

cross the Jordan, and Gideon sent to the Ephraimites to watch the fords by which alone they could cross—especially Bethbarah, the “place of passage.” The men of Ephraim did so, and, meeting the discomfited foe, cut off their flight, and slew their two desert chiefs, whose very names showed their ferocious breeding—Oreb and Zeeb, the “raven” and the “wolf;” but the proud tribe which aspired to the chieftainship of Israel found fault with Gideon when he came up in the pursuit, for not having called them to the battle. He was in far too much speed to debate the point, or let the enemy escape while he quarrelled. To hunt the Midianite remnant home, and destroy their two terrible remaining chiefs, mattered far more than who ought to have been called to the battle. He only answered modestly that the gleanings won by the great tribe, in the slaughter of the runaways and of Oreb and Zeeb, was better worth having than the harvest reaped by his own little family of Abiezer; and their vanity was so far satisfied that they let him hurry on with the brave three hundred, faint, hungry, weary, yet still not slackening their chase. At Succoth—the place named after Jacob’s booths—he entreated for food for his band, but the men of Succoth, envious or distrustful, answered that they saw no proof of his deserving to be fed; and at Penuel, where Jacob’s mysterious wrestling had taken place, he was equally ill received. He passed on with a short stern threat to each, and the men who had been self-contained and dignified when they quenched their thirst at the spring of Harod, were staunch and constant, through all hunger and weariness, in finishing the victory of the Lord.

[Gideon’s victory was won by the flash of the torches in the pitchers; so was the Light of Truth hidden in earthen vessels—namely, within the breasts of the holy Apostles, who sounded the trumpet of the Gospel, and made the Light to shine forth, and shine all the more when their perishable bodies were broken; and the brightness of their doctrine has shone even to the ends of the earth.]

LESSON XXXI.

THE VICTORY.

JUDGES viii. 10—32.

Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor,* and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east : for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host : for the host was secure.

And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him : and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.

And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary ?

And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught † the men of Succoth.

And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor ? And they answered, As thou art, so were they ; each one resembled the children of a king.

And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother : as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.

And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword : for he feared, because he was yet a youth.

Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us : for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments ‡ that were on their camels' necks.

Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also : for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you : the LORD shall rule over you.

And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

* Level place.

† Chastised.

‡ Little moons.

And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.

And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold ; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks.

And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah : and all Israel went thither after it : which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

And Gideon had threescore and ten sons : for he had many wives.

And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

COMMENT.—The two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, had fled far on to a level place with about half of their numbers, and these thought themselves secure, but the terrible Gideon, pursuing them even thither, defeated their army again, and chased the kings until he had made them both prisoners. This driving them even to their desert homes broke the force of the Midianites for many a day, so that it is long before we find them coming again to rob and despoil the fields of Israel. Gideon brought his two captives back to show to the churlish men of Succoth and Penuel, who had refused him aid in his pursuit. He found a young man of the place who might describe to him the elders who had thus answered him, and after he had shown them the two captive Midianites, he took thorny and spring branches of the trees in the wilderness, and with them taught the men of Succoth—"made them to know"—what it was to refuse to come to the help of the warriors of the Lord. The men of Succoth were beaten with thorns, the men of Penuel had their tower broken down, and some of them were even slain. It seems a harsh punishment, but any slackness towards these battles of the Lord was always severely visited ; and Gideon, if he were to be the defender and Judge of Israel, needed to make himself respected and feared. Afterwards, he examined Zebah and Zalmunna as to some Manassites whom they had slain at Mount Tabor. They were like himself, the kings said, "each one like the son of a king." Gideon knew them by that token for his own slaughtered brothers. Otherwise he would have spared the captives, but by that old law he was

the Revenger of blood, and therefore bound to put them to death ; or rather, his own eldest son, Jether, as heir of all these brothers, was the Revenger as nearest of kin, and Gideon called him to slay the two kings, but the youth shrank back, and Zebah and Zalmunna entreated to die by the strong steady hand of the father, rather than by the weak and faltering stroke of the lad.

Long years after, when other foes were invading Judah, the Levites sang—

Do thou unto them as unto the Madianites,
As to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison,
Which perished at En-dor.
They became as the dung of the earth.
Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb,
Yea, all their princes as Zebah and as Zalmunna,
Who said, " Let us take to ourselves
The houses of God in possession."

The trophies Gideon took from these two were the ornaments or little silver moons that hung from their camels' necks, perhaps in honour of Ashtarothe, or the moon.

The Israelites wanted to make him their king, and to establish the kingdom in his family, but he nobly bade them own that the Lord was their only King, and refused to do more than act as the defender or Judge appointed by Him. All he would allow them to give him was the rings worn in the ears and noses of the slain Midianites. These, when heaped together in one cloak spread on the ground, amounted to seventy pounds' weight. He did not desire this treasure for himself, but to dedicate it as a thank-offering to God. There is reason to think that, after the death of the great Phinehas, the priests at Shiloh had grown careless and indifferent. At any rate there is no mention of them, and this seems to have tempted Gideon to dedicate the beautiful ephod, or priestly garment he made with the gold, in his own house instead of at Shiloh. This became a snare to him and the Israelites ; and though he did not worship, nor permit the worship of, any God save the Lord, there was a tendency to come to Gideon's ephod rather than to observe the appointed sacrifices and feasts in the appointed way.

And this led to frightful evil when Gideon, having guarded Israel through a long life, died, and was buried at his own home, whence the Holy One had called him away from his winepress.

INTER-CHAPTER.—THE HISTORY OF ABIMELECH.

(For the Elder ones only.)

Among the many mothers of Gideon's children was a woman of Shechem. Her son Abimelech was not supposed to have equal rights with his seventy brethren, but was thrust out by them from the home of Abi-Ezer, at Ophrah. Meantime, the Israelites disliked the heirs of Gideon, and not only forgot the benefits he had done them, but fell away from the true faith, and worshipped, at Shechem, Baal-berith, the Baal of the covenant, as if with a strange remembrance of the covenant with the true God that had been made at Shechem. To Shechem, his mother's home, Abimelech repaired with his complaints of his brothers, and the men of the city gave him in compensation seventy pieces of silver out of the shrine of Baal-berith. By this means he hired a party of ruffians, with whom he went to Ophrah, and then slaughtered the whole of his family, except Jotham, the youngest, who found a hiding-place.

Thereupon the Shechemites, struck by the ferocity they took for courage, made Abimelech their king—theirs alone—not of the whole commonwealth of Israel. And the place of his installation was the plain of the pillar of Shechem, the very monument Joshua had left of the covenant they were so flagrantly breaking. But in the midst of their rejoicings a voice was heard. It came from one of the cliffs of Gerizim, the mount once of blessing, far above and out of reach, yet so near that the clear tones could be distinctly heard by the assembly around their new king. It said—

Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.

But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.

And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Then said all the trees unto the bramble,* Come thou, and reign over us.

And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over

* Buckthorn.

you, then come and put your trust in my shadow : and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands ;

(For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian :

And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maid-servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother ;)

If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you :

But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo ;* and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

The speaker was Jotham, the one son of Jerubbaal who had escaped, and who, by this poetical apologue or parable, taken from the very plants that still surround the spot, showed them how authority is apt to be shunned by the most worthy, and grasped at by the most weak and mischievous. It is the bramble that makes itself king of the trees, and calls on them to come under its shadow ! As if that were possible ! Moreover, as the crackling straggling thorn is the first to catch fire, and thus lead to the burning of a whole forest, so Jotham foretold that the savage Abimelech would be the destruction of Shechem, and Shechem of Abimelech. He left it to their own consciences to judge what they deserved, and then was gone, disappearing among the cliffs and thickets of Gerizim !

For three years Abimelech reigned in Arumah, a place near Shechem, leaving the city itself to his lieutenant, Zebul. Then a man named Gaal, who seems to have been of the old Canaanite blood, invited the Shechemites to a vintage feast, and there worked them up to admit him into the city in readiness to rise against Abimelech. However, Zebul gained intelligence, and sent word to Abimelech to come and surprise the city before the insurrection was matured. Accordingly Abimelech lay in ambush outside the gate, while Zebul held Gaal in conversation, and prevented him from taking measures of defence till it was too late. When Abimelech's whole force had

* Citadel or fortress.

mustered, Zebul laughed Gaal to scorn for his intended rebellion, and closed the gates upon him and his adherents. Abimelech fought with them outside the walls, killed Gaal, and then punished the city with utter destruction, even sowing the ground with salt, the token of annihilation. Still some men remained shut up in the Millo, *i.e.* the citadel where was the shrine of Baal-berith. There they held out till Abimelech caused branches to be cut in the forest, and, setting fire to them, suffocated all within the tower. He then went to Thebez, a town about thirteen miles off, which seems to have joined in the revolt. The inhabitants took refuge in a tower, which he was going to have burnt, like the Millo of Shechem, when a woman threw down from the top of the tower the upper one of the two millstones wherewith the women were wont to grind the corn. It fractured his skull, but in his pride he could not bear to die by a woman's hand, and bade his armour-bearer give him his death-stroke. So easily did Israel, whenever they forsook their God, lapse into the wildest and most horrid violence !

LESSON XXXII.

NAOMI AND RUTH.

RUTH i.

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

And Elimelech Naomi's husband died ; and she was left, and her two sons.

And they took them wives of the women of Moab ; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth : and they dwelled there about ten years.

And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them ; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab : for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

And Ruth said,

Intreat me not to leave thee,
Or to return from following after thee:
For whither thou goest, I will go;
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
Thy people shall be my people,
And thy God my God:
Where thou diest, will I die,
And there will I be buried:
The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If ought but death part thee and me.

When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi,* call me Mara:† for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

COMMENT.—After Abimelech, the judges were Tola, a man of Issachar, and Jair, a Gileadite. It must have been in the time of one or other of these that these homely incidents happened, which have been recorded because they concern the ancestry of our blessed Lord and also because of their typical meaning.

* Pleasant.

† Bitter.

It has been said by a traveller in the Holy Land, that a very striking feature in the view from Bethlehem is the apparent nearness of the mountains of Moab, which seem completely to overhang the Dead Sea. Bethlehem itself is built on a grey limestone ridge among the hills ; in the valley below lie the famous corn-fields from whence it takes its name—the House of Bread. The view is very extensive ; and beyond the broad sheet of the Dead Sea lie the purple hills of Moab, which have been described as looking like “a straight line traced by a trembling hand.” Therefore, when there came a famine, and corn was wanted, even in the city which was called “Ephratah,” the “fruitful,” a man named Elimelech—of the noblest family in the tribe of Judah, being descended from Naason, the prince of the tribe—with Naomi his wife, and his two sons, went to seek bread in the near country of Moab. And so we are brought to know her whose name is given to this book—the young Moabitess, Ruth, who married one of the sons, and, together with her mother and sister-in-law, was left a widow in the land.

Whether it was right for Elimelech to go to a land of idolaters is not said ; and where the Bible does not blame, we should take heed how we condemn. It may be, he did not sufficiently trust the God who has said, “Dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed ;” and the family did not prosper in Moab ; but God, for His own wise purposes, doubtless ordained that these members of the tribe of Judah should go forth, and bring back with them a Gentile woman, to be made one with His own people.

Ten years after their first settlement in Moab, Naomi, bereaved of her husband and sons, hearing that the famine was ended, desired to return to Bethlehem. Ruth and Orpah went some distance with her ; how far we do not know, but it was perhaps down the mountains and pasture hill, until they came to the swift torrent of Jordan, “the descender.” Then Naomi bade them return. Orpah loved her mother-in-law ; but her own country and people were dearer, and after a tender farewell she went back ; but Ruth clave to the desolate widow, and poured out, with all the warmth of her loving heart, the noble words which formed themselves into a beautiful chant of poetry upon her lips. This was a very solemn undertaking, for Ruth the Moabitess thus broke the tie with her

own heathen kindred, forsook "Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites," and embraced the worship of the God of Israel, of whom her husband and her mother-in-law had taught her. She chose poverty and widowhood with the pure worship of the LORD JEHOVAH rather than prosperity and marriage with the foul rites of Chemosh. [If she were chiefly moved by filial affection, that is God's chosen way of leading us higher still ; and thus it was that, like the Gentile Church, she came out from among the heathen, and united herself to the chosen seed ; thus it was that like Rahab, the believing woman of Jericho, Ruth of Moab is mentioned in the genealogy of the Messiah.] So the two women went on together across the fords of Jordan and the plain of Jericho, and reached Bethlehem in the spring-time, during the months of barley harvest.

From the expression that all the city was moved at seeing them, and from Naomi's answer to their words of surprise, it is evident that her condition was greatly altered, and that she was reduced from prosperity to poverty. But the God of the fatherless and widow was with her.

LESSON XXXIII.

THE HARVEST AT BETHLEHEM.

RUTH ii.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech : and his name was Boaz.

And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers : and her hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.

Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?

And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the

* Chance.

Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab :

And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves : so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter ? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens :

Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them : have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee ? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger ?

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband : and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity,* and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

The LORD recompense † thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord ; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.

And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers : and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. ‡

And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not :

And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned : and it was about an ephah § of barley.

And she took it up, and went into the city : and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned : and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. ||

And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day ? and where wroughtest ¶ thou ? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz.

And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter,

* Birth.

† Reward.

‡ Had enough and some over.

§ About four gallons.

|| The parched corn remaining from what Boaz had given her.

¶ Worked.

that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.

So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.

COMMENT.—The name of Bethlehem means “the place of bread,” and the corn-fields were waving along its slopes. Twice over had the command been given in advance, while as yet Israel knew only manna: “And when ye shall reap the harvest of your land, ye shall not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and the fatherless. I am the LORD” (Lev. xix. 9, 10).

Of this beautiful, merciful law the two widows gladly availed themselves. Barley harvest began with the offering of the wave-sheaf at the Passover, wheat harvest with the presenting the loaf at the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and therefore, in the Jewish synagogues, the Book of Ruth is appointed to be read after the Feast of Weeks. And Bethlehem is a Christian village, and still very like what it was 3,000 years ago. Let us see what a traveller in our own day says:—

“The reapers were in the fields cutting barley, and after every company were women and children gleaning, just as Ruth did when Boaz came to look at his labourers. Yes, and in the evening you might see some poor woman or maiden that had been permitted to glean on her own account, sitting by the roadside and beating out with a stick or a stone what she had gathered, as Ruth did. I have often watched this process in various parts of the country.” The traveller adds, that still the master salutes his reapers with “Allah el éikum,” *i.e.* “The Lord be with you,” and they reply, “The Lord bless thee.” He also adds that harvesters collect from a distance to these fertile fields, and are apt to be rude to lonely women, now as then, when Boaz, seeing the stranger, bade her keep among his own people, to secure her from having her poverty and alien blood cast up to her. The meals, too, are the same. The vinegar into which Ruth was invited to dip her morsel is strong wine turned sour, nauseous as a draught, but as a sop in small quantities refreshing to a thirsty mouth in the middle of the toil of a summer’s day, when all

sit down under a shed to eat and rest during the burning hour of noon. The parched corn is thus prepared : "A quantity of the best ears, not too ripe, are plucked with the stalks attached. These are tied into small parcels, a blazing fire is kindled with dry grass and thorn bushes, and the corn heads are held in it till the chaff is mostly burnt off. The grain is thus sufficiently roasted to be eaten, and it is a favourite article all over the country. After it has been roasted it is rubbed out in the hand, and eaten as there is occasion."

How much an ephah is we cannot be quite sure, whether four gallons or eight, but it was certainly ten times as much as the single Israelite's daily portion of manna, so that one day's gleanings had laid in provision for five days. Well might Naomi's heart be cheered and thankful, and when she heard the name of Boaz she was the more struck, for Boaz was of the kinsmen of her husband, one of the *goels*, or redeemers, whose duty it was to take to himself the wife of the deceased, if he left no child ; to redeem or buy back his lands, that they might not go out of the family ; and to avenge his death if he were slain. Providence had led Ruth to her rightful protector, and all unwittingly, in the kindness of his heart, he had guarded her ; and in this Naomi verily saw the hand of the Lord.

[Thus the Gentile Church, coming to glean the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, is brought in to be partaker with His own children, and to share in His overflowing benefits.]

LESSON XXXIV.

THE THRESHING-FLOOR OF BOAZ.

RUTH iii.

Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee ?

And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast ? Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor.

Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor : but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.

And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in and uncover his feet; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.

And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn; and she came softly unto his feet.

And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself:

And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt* over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.

And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.

Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then I will do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning.

And early in the morning she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor.

Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.

And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.

Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

COMMENT.—Threshing-floors in Palestine are spaces of rock on hill-tops, sometimes natural, sometimes paved with large stones. As rain never comes but in its own due seasons, there is no need to stack the corn, but the sheaves are carried to the rocky floor, and there a sort of slab or raft made of wood, with rough stones or iron teeth on the under-side, is dragged over them by oxen, which are driven by a man either standing or seated on a kind of chair fixed

* Take under thy protection.

to the slab, till the grain is not only forced out of the ears, but the very straw ground up into chaff. It is a very joyous time : children delight to ride upon the slab ; and the kindness of the law of Moses had provided that the oxen should never be muzzled, but should feed plentifully of the good things around them.

Afterwards the corn is winnowed, or cleared of chaff, generally only by stirring the mass about with a fork, so that the wind, which is nearly sure to blow in a mountain land so near the sea, carries away the chaff and leaves the grain ; but sometimes this is assisted by a fan or canvas sail being waved up and down to blow away the dust. The winnowing is generally carried on in the evening, when a breeze is nearly sure to spring up, and the master and his harvestmen often sleep among the store of sheaves piled up, both to be ready for the morning's work and to secure their corn from robbers. They lie down in all their clothes, but with a wrapper of coarse cloth over their feet.

Just so it was with Boaz, when Naomi devised that her daughter-in-law should take this opportunity of speaking to him alone, and claiming his protection as representative of her dead husband Mahlon. No doubt, as Boaz was a rich and stately man, it was very difficult for the destitute young widow to obtain access to him, and it was needful that her appeal should be made in private. Therefore she was to venture into the midst of the sleeping reapers, and speak to him by night, and this purpose she carried out, calling on Boaz, when he awoke and discovered her, to take her under his protection as the *goel* or next of kin to her husband, whose duty it was to redeem his name from being lost, his land from being alienated.

Boaz was much touched, and praised her for her faithfulness to her husband's name and honour, in not turning to men of her own age, but appealing to him, already an elderly man ; but he explained that he was not the real *goel*, for there was another kinsman, nearer than he, whose claims must not be set aside, which was probably the reason he had not come forward sooner. Then bidding Ruth spread her veil, a great wrapping mantle that enveloped head and figure alike, he filled it with six measures of the winnowed corn, and she went home to her mother-in-law in the grey dawn of morning, ere one face could be known from another.

LESSON XXXV.

THE MARRIAGE OF BOAZ AND RUTH.

RUTH iv. 1—17.

Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there : and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by ; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one ! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.

And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's.

And I thought to advertise* thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it : but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know : for there is none to redeem it beside thee ; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar † mine own inheritance : redeem thou my right to thyself ; for I cannot redeem it.

Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things ; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour : and this was a testimony in Israel.

Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place : ye are witnesses this day.

And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel ; and do thou worthily in Ephratah, ‡ and be famous in Beth-lehem :

And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

* Inform.

† Hurt.

‡ The fruitful : the older name of Bethlehem.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife : and she bare a son.

And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age : for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him.

And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi ; and they called his name Obed : he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

COMMENT.—Every town or village in the East had walls of stone or mud, thick and high, to preserve the inhabitants from the sudden robberies of the desert wanderers. Deep gateways were made through these walls, and in the broad shady space in front of them was the great place of meeting for public or private affairs. Justice was dispensed by the elders sitting in the gate, and whatever a man wished to proclaim to his neighbours he carried to the gate. So there Boaz seated himself to watch for the man who was nearer of kin than himself.

To understand what follows, we must go back to the law as laid down in the Book of Leviticus and further defined in Deuteronomy. The parcels of land allotted to the Israelites were to continue in their families for ever. If a man chose to sell his property, he could only do so till the ensuing jubilee, when it went back to him or to his children, and the price of the estate of course varied according to the length of time before the jubilee. Moreover, if a man left no son, but only a daughter, she might not marry a man who did not belong to her own tribe, so as to bring strangers in. If there were no child at all, it was the custom that the nearest of kin should take the widow to wife, and that the firstborn son should be counted as standing in the place of the dead man and have his inheritance, while the second might stand in the place of his own father. This was held as a sacred duty to the deceased, and neither the *goel* nor the widow was free to marry elsewhere till the offer had been made. If the *goel* would not take the widow, and accept the obligation towards his dead relation, the rule was that the woman should come to him in the presence of the elders, and loose his

shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and say, "So shall it be done unto him that will not build up his brother's house" (Deut. xxv. 9).^{*} He had failed in respect to the dead, so he was to suffer indignity, and be as one who walked barefoot.

Now the estate of Elimelech had been sold at the time of his going to Moab, and at the time of the jubilee it would come back to Elimelech's representative. What Naomi had to sell was the right to redeem or buy it back till the year of jubilee, and of her desire to do this Boaz informed his kinsman, who was willing to do so at first, Naomi being an old woman whom there was no question of marrying. But then Boaz went on to say that besides Naomi there was Mahlon's widow, Ruth the Moabitess, and that whoever bought the field must also marry her, and then that her eldest son would inherit the field and be counted as the son of Mahlon. When the kinsman heard this, he refused the purchase, saying it would mar his own inheritance : he would not spend money on what would not be his own but belong to Ruth's son, who would not be counted like his, nor would he take the despised stranger widow who went gleanings in the fields with the poor.

The rough insulting old form was spared to the gentle Ruth ; it was enough that before all the elders in the gate the kinsman (whose name is concealed) took off his sandal and handed it to Boaz, who thus stood next to Mahlon and was free to wed Ruth. Boaz himself, and most likely Elimelech the kinsman too, was descended from Rahab of Jericho, so that he could well believe in the faithfulness of one gathered in from the heathen ; and the marriage blessing sung by the elders rehearsed the most prosperous persons among his fathers—dwelling on Rachel before Leah, in honour of her tomb at Ephrath. Observe : that little bit of land which the kinsman thought would mar his inheritance was that which was to belong to the kingly line—nay, it was in right of that portion of ground that the Blessed Virgin came with Joseph to

^{*} This Levirate marriage, so called from the Latin *levir*, a brother-in-law, was an old custom all over the East. This rule was intended to limit it to cases where the former marriage was childless. Otherwise to marry a brother's wife was expressly forbidden, and so the roughness of the form is not to be looked on as first enjoined by Moses under Divine inspiration, but as an existing custom, which was thus regulated and brought into form, and recorded for us, because there are spiritual meanings connected with it.

Bethlehem for the enrolment ; it was the most honoured inheritance in all the earth. And so it was that, by shrinking from a duty in a sort of selfish contempt, this son of Judah lost the honour and blessing of being a forefather of the Christ, and Boaz gained the honour he lost and the birthright he neglected. [By not shrinking from his duty to the forlorn stranger widow, he rose not only into an ancestor, but into a type, of the great Lord of the Harvest, who regardeth the stranger and the widow, and who espouseth to Himself His Church, a widow and desolate.]

LESSON XXXVI.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

JUDGES x. 10—18 ; xi. 1, 5—14, 28—31.

Two Judges, named Ibzan and Abdon, are next mentioned ; but corruption was making way among the Israelites, and they betook themselves to all the idols of the surrounding nations, till great misery fell on them through the invasions of the Ammonites, who dwelt on the further side of Jordan, and not only vexed the tribes there, but crossed over to attack Ephraim and Judah. There was then a cry unto the Lord, but a stern answer came back.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines ?

The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you ; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods : wherefore I will deliver you no more.

Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen ; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned ; do thou unto us whatever seemeth good unto thee ; deliver us, we pray thee, this day.

And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD : and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh.

And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour.

And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah.

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon. [And they rehearsed unto him how the land had been taken from Sihon king of Heshbon.]

Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over* Gilead and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

COMMENT.—Nothing but distress brought this stubborn people to God, and He bade them turn to the idols they loved, and seek deliverance from them! Yet when they had put away their strange gods, "He was so merciful that He forgave their misdeeds, and destroyed them not." There was some hope among them when they met at Mizpeh (where Jacob had made his covenant with Laban), and prepared to fight against the Ammonites, but they greatly wanted a leader until the Gileadites bethought them of

* Went through collecting men.

Jephthah, a mighty man of valour, who was living a wild sort of outlaw life at Tob, on the borders of Syria. Before he would consent to lead the army, he required that he should be appointed head and captain at least of the two tribes and a half on the east of Jordan ; and this being granted, he sent an embassy to the king of Ammon, demanding the cause of the war. The king of Ammon replied by laying claim to the whole land of Gilead, and to this Jephthah answered (at greater length than is given in our lesson) by rehearsing the history of the campaign against Sihon and Og, in which Gilead had been conquered from the Amorites—not the Ammonites, who now demanded it.

However, the king of Ammon continued his hostilities, and Jephthah became inspired with the Spirit of the Lord. Every power is a gift of God and the Holy Ghost, and His gift of the Spirit of Might came to make Jephthah a successful captain in war,—by faith, no doubt, for he is mentioned in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, but it was faith in the Lord as giving the victory ; it was the Spirit of Victory that led him forth, and his whole character, that of a fierce impetuous man, remained untamed. He had had little training in the law, and had become infected with the temper if not with the worship of the heathen, and it was in that vehement temper that he made his wild vow to offer up unto the Lord the first thing that should meet him on his return.

LESSON XXXVII.

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.

JUDGES xi. 32—40 ; xii. 1—7.

So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them ; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

And Jephthah came to Mizpeh * unto his house, and, behold, his daughter

* The Watch-tower.

came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances : and she was his only child ; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter ! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me : for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth ; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me : let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months : and she went with her companions and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed. And it was a custom in Israel,

That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee ? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon ; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand : wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me ?

Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim ; and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites : and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over ; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite ? If he said, Nay ;

Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth : * and he said Sibboleth : for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan : and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

COMMENT.—Having made his rash vow, in hopes in his ignorance and vehemence to secure his victory from God, Jephthah gave

* A stream.

battle to the Ammonites, and utterly routed them, driving them far back into their own country, and taking twenty cities from them, reaching from Aroer to Minnith, and breaking their strength for many years to come.

Then he returned in triumph to his home, the watch-tower of Gilead. Alas! the first creature that met his eye was his daughter, his only child, leading the triumphant dance of maidens, singing and clashing their timbrels, like Miriam or Deborah. His vow had turned joy into bitter grief; and at this time, so much had the training of the law been lost, that no one seems to have perceived that the command not to offer up son or daughter in the fire (Deut. xii. 31) ought to have come before the keeping of the vow. Jephthah wept and lamented, but the heroic maiden herself would not so much as even beg him to break his vow, but only asked for two months' respite, to wander with her companions on the wooded hills of Gilead, and mourn that she could never be a mother in Israel, nor share in the ancestry of the Seed of the Woman.

Then she freely returned, and her father "did with her according to his vow." Some few tender hearts have hoped that she lived a dedicated life like a nun; but there is no probability in this—no one even thought of so explaining it till modern times. Jephthah had lived untaught among the heathen, and learnt their customs, even while he worshipped the Lord. Had the right system of the law been carried out, he would have redeemed her by other offerings, after presenting her before the Lord in Shiloh, as the firstborn was redeemed; but a Jewish tradition says that the reigning high priest of the line of Phinehas was deposed, and Eli, the descendant of Ithamar, Aaron's younger son, put in his place, in consequence of his having allowed this unhappy deed. But this is not certain, and it rather seems as if Jephthah, in his remote hills, consulted no priest, but "did that which was right in his own eyes."

In the meantime, the tribe of Ephraim, which always claimed to be the first, became mad with jealousy at the outlaw Jephthah having presumed to make war against the national enemies, and, crossing the Jordan in arms, threatened to ravage and destroy his house. He answered that the Ammonites invaded, there was no help in Ephraim, and he had been forced to take the command;

but as this did not silence their jealousy, he was obliged to give them battle—routed them—and as they fled to cross the Jordan, they found the fords already held by his men. It seems that the Ephraimites could not pronounce the sound *sh*, so that to know friends from foes, the Gileadites made every one who tried to cross utter the word *shibboleth*, which means “a stream,” and, if he only said “*sibboleth*,” slew him as an Ephraimite fighting not against the foes, but against the defender, of his country. This battle established Jephthah as Judge of Israel, but he only lived six years, a much shorter time than any other of the Judges. Could his life be cut short by sorrow for the loss of his daughter? He has left us this lesson—that to act after our own judgment instead of by rule leads to deadly error, and that a wrong promise must not be kept.

LESSON XXXVIII.

HANNAH'S PETITION.

I SAMUEL i. 1—20.

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim,* of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite :

And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah : and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there.

And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions :

But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion ; † for he loved Hannah : but she had no child.

And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret.

* Ramah of the watchmen or the prophets.

† Parts of the peace-offering on which they feasted. Most likely the large quantity was to enable her to give to the widow, the poor, and the fatherless, who received portions at these feasts.

And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?

So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth.

Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial:* for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and the LORD remembered Hannah.

Wherefore it came to pass that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel,† saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

COMMENT.—Though the Israelites so grievously neglected the worship of the Lord at Shiloh, the place where He had set His name, there were some who faithfully went up three times a year to the three feasts of the Passover, the Weeks, and the Tabernacles. One of these was a man named Elkanah, who lived at Ramah, one of the cities of the Levites, in the tribe of Ephraim, so that he was sometimes called an Ephraimite, though he was really one of the family of Kohath, descended from Korah. He had two wives—Hannah, whose name means “grace,” and Peninnah, “a pearl.”

* A wicked, reprobate person.

† Asked of God.

It was somewhat as it was with Rachel and Leah : the childless wife was the best beloved, but the mother of the many children vexed the barren woman with taunts and mockery. But, unlike Rachel, Hannah did not turn on her husband with "Give me children, or I die." She betook herself unto the Lord. It must be remembered that the desire of children was with Israelite women far more than the tender yearning for the joy and love of motherhood ; it was the hope to be parent, either directly or remotely, to the Seed of the Woman, the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations should be blessed ; the Sceptre of Judah, the Prophet like unto Moses—for by these names they already knew Him who was to come. Her grief, and the sorrow she suffered from Peninnah, were so great that her husband perceived it, and strove to comfort her ; but she must have been a woman of the kindest and meekest spirit, since she never seems to have complained to him of the woman who had become an adversary or enemy to her. Only she poured out her soul before the Lord. After the family had eaten and drunk, *i.e.* partaken of their peace-offerings, with cups of wine—the means, like a sacrament, by which they made themselves sharers in the sacrifice—she went apart in the women's court to pray. It was just as a Christian now offers special prayers at the Communion of the Body of Christ, the Great Sacrifice, with special hope and confidence. So fervent was her unspoken prayer, that her agitation was mistaken by the high priest for the effect of wine, and he rebuked her ; but she answered with humble meekness that touched his heart, and won his blessing on her and on her prayer and vow.

For she had not prayed for a son merely to be her pleasure and protector. Her desire was to give him to the Lord all his life, making him one of those persons who set themselves apart for special devotion to God, left their hair long, and drank no wine, and were called "Nazarites," from a word meaning "separate." Therefore, when the babe for whom she had prayed was granted to her, she named him Samuel, or "asked of God," and viewed him not as hers, but as the Lord's. And thus, like Rachel, Hannah is a type of the Gentile Church—later a mother—but beloved.

Eli, the present high priest, was a descendant of Ithamar, not

Phinehas. He was the first distinguished high priest since Phinehas, and was likewise Judge, probably over the tribes within the Jordan, while Jephthah was protecting those on the eastward.

LESSON XXXIX.

THE DEDICATION OF SAMUEL.

I SAMUEL i. 21—28 ; ii. 1—10, 18—21.

And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow.

But Hannah went not up ; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever.

And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good ; tarry until thou have weaned him ; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.

And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh : and the child was young.

And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.

For this child I prayed ; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him :

Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD ; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

And Hannah prayed, and said,

My heart rejoiceth in the LORD,
Mine horn is exalted in the LORD ;*
My mouth is enlarged † over mine enemies ;
Because I rejoice in thy salvation.
There is none holy as the LORD :
For there is none beside thee :
Neither is there any rock like our God.
Talk no more so exceeding proudly ;
Let not arrogancy ‡ come out of your mouth :
For the LORD is a God of knowledge,
And by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty men are broken,

* I am glad.

† Open wide in praise.

‡ Pride.

And they that stumbled are girded with strength.
They that were full have hired out themselves for bread ;
And they that were hungry ceased :
So that the barren hath borne seven ;
And she that hath many children is waxed feeble.
The LORD killeth, and maketh alive :
He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.
The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich :
He bringeth low, and lifteth up.
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
And lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill,
To set them among princes,
And to make them inherit the throne of glory :
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
And he hath set the world upon them.
He will keep the feet of his saints,
And the wicked shall be silent in darkness ;
For by strength shall no man prevail.
The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces :
Out of heaven shall he thunder upon them :
The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth ;
And he shall give strength unto his king,
And exalt the horn of his anointed.

But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.

Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home.

And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.

COMMENT.—While her babe was young, Hannah remained at home to tend him ; but as soon as he was able to do without her care, she remembered that she had promised him unto the Lord. She was not like those who make vows in their distress and forget them when their trouble is over, for she denied herself all the delights of watching his boyhood, and brought her little Nazarene with his long hair upon his shoulders to be presented to the Lord for his special service. The three bullocks were—one for the burnt-offering, an atonement to purify the dedication ; the other two for a thank-offering and a feast with the wine and flour. The words “the child was young” imply in the Hebrew that he was a child indeed, humble, simple, and obedient, fit to be thus consecrated,

and, indeed, one of the children of whom our Lord said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

And at that dedication, Hannah, the first of the children of Korah in whom we find the gift of holy psalmody that was to shine so brightly in the family afterwards, led a solemn song of thanksgiving, full of prophecy. She speaks of her horn being exalted. This image is taken from the gazelles of the hills, or the wild bull of Ephraim, creatures that raise their horned brows in dignity when happy. Her mouth is opened to rejoice in the salvation or safety that the Holy Spirit, who was speaking by her, assured her the boy she had dedicated would give to Israel, through trust in God, the Rock of Strength. Just as Peninnah could no more boast over her, no more should the enemies of Israel rejoice over them, when once the Levite boy should be led forth against them by God ; for, as she goes on to say, the Lord can set up the poor and weak, and bring down the proud and mighty ; for the earth is His temple, and rests upon His will. "He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His Anointed." Thus did the inspired mother conclude her song of consecration of him who should anoint two kings for Israel, and in one of them set apart the royal line whence the Seed should come. It is Hannah who thus, first of all, prophesying far, far on beyond either David or Saul, uses this word Anointed—Messiah in the Hebrew, Christ as we use it from the Greek—denoting the kingly, priestly, and prophetic offices of the Redeemer. He it is who is the "salvation" of all the world ; He it is who putteth down the proud and wise in their own conceit, and exalteth those who humble themselves ; who made the Jews, once full, go hungry away, and filled those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness ; who accepted the formerly barren Gentile Church, when the Jewish ceased to bring forth children unto Him ; who raised the beggar from the dunghill to be carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, and who at the end shall put down all enemies under His feet. So far and so gloriously did Hannah's song look on and on, though not in full understood by her who sung or by those who heard. There it remained—to be sung by the Levites, a little altered, as the 111th Psalm ; and it can hardly be doubted that it was taken up and made fuller and more glorious by the ever-blessed Mary, when she was giving

thanks for the promise of the true Anointed, and which we sing in thanksgiving for His Incarnation.

The child was left, wearing the sacred white scarf, or ephod, which marked him for the service of the tabernacle, growing in holiness before the Lord; and his mother saw him when she came to the feasts, and yearly brought him a little coat, *i.e.* a long robe down to the feet, like the priests', which no doubt she loved to spin and weave for him, thinking of him as he attended dutifully, in all a child Levite could do, on the services of Shiloh. But she had other joys; for God, rewarding as He always does those who give unto Him, made her mother to five more children, that "her joy might be full."

LESSON XL.

HOPHNI AND PHINEHAS.

I SAMUEL ii. 12—17; 22—36.

Now the sons of Eli were the sons of Belial: * they knew not the LORD.

And the priest's custom with the people was, that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, † with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand:

And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.

Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw.

And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.

Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

* * * * *

Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel;

And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.

* Emptiness—good-for-nothing men.

† Boiling.

Nay, my sons ; for it is no good report that I hear : ye make the LORD's people to transgress.

If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him : but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him ? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.

And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.

And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house ?

And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me ? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel ?

Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation ; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people ?

Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever : but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me ; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm,* and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house.

And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel : and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.

And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart : and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.

And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas ; in one day they shall die both of them.

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind : and I will build him a sure house ; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.

COMMENT.—It must have been a great trial of faith to Elkanah and Hannah to leave their little son at Shiloh. They could only have done so in the security that if they gave their child to God, He would take care of him ; for though Eli, the high priest, was good, gentle, and godly, he was very old, and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were said to be sons of Belial, that is, "wickedness,"

* Destroy thy strength.

according to the Eastern fashion of saying that a person is the son of any quality he possesses in a great degree. Though living at the sanctuary, and the chosen priests of God, they knew not the Lord. For, unhappily, it sometimes happens that young people who are bred up among holy things let themselves grow used to them, as it were, and so familiar that they lose their awe and reverence, and then are worse than those who have been more on the outside, and have their feelings fresh. While Samuel shows how blessed it may be to grow up among holy things, Hophni and Phinehas show how dangerous it may be.

Now the Law had declared (Lev. vii. 31—35) that when the people came up with their yearly gifts at the feast of ingathering, bringing their peace-offerings to feast upon in honour of the Lord, the blood of the animal sacrificed should be poured out, and the fat burnt on the altar by a priest, as the Lord's part; then that the shoulder and the breast should be waved before the Lord, by the same priest, and remain with him as his share, and that the rest should be feasted upon by the offerer, his family, and friends, and portions given away to the poor. But Hophni and Phinehas were not content with this arrangement. Instead of attending to present the sacrifice as the priests of God, they only cared to seize a goodly portion from the feast, and whilst the flesh was being cooked they sent a servant with a great three-toothed hook to snatch out of the vessel all that he could bring up. Or before the fat was burnt by the priest, the servant would come down and seize upon the meat, fat and all, for himself or his masters, adding to the vexation of the plundered Israelites by rude words and threats, so that they began to loathe and dread the coming up to the sanctuary, where they were sure to be insulted and ill-treated, not only in this, but in other ways, so that Shiloh had come to be a disgrace.

When the gentle old Eli at length heard of his sons' doings, he reasoned with them. He reminded them that when man sins against man, the Judge decides between them, and there is room for redress; but when a man sins against God Himself, as they were doing, what intercession could avail? It was terrible, hopeless, wilful sin! Eli felt the evil deeply, but he only spoke, he did not hinder it; he was too weakly kind to put down his sons from

the office of which they were so unworthy, and thus he became in truth an enemy to them and to his much-loved Shiloh, which he let them defile and drive Israel from. Warning was not wanting. A stranger prophet brought Eli a message from God, reminding him how God had appeared to Moses and Aaron, and had given to Aaron's family their due share of all burnt-offerings. Yet Eli was allowing these rules to be transgressed. He was honouring his sons more than God, in that he permitted them to continue to dishonour God, thus either loving or fearing them more than his Maker. Therefore the great sentence is declared, "Them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed,"—and therefore a terrible punishment should come, no other than a lasting and awful doom on all the descendants of these wicked men. They should lose the honours they used so ill, there should not be an old man among them for ever, and they should die in the flower of their age (as we shall see fulfilled in the slaughter of the priests by Saul). Hophni and Phinehas themselves would both perish at the same time, and a faithful priest should be raised in their stead, to whom their children should come crouching and begging for the humblest employment as a priest.

This promise of the faithful priest pointed first to little, innocent Samuel, who, though only a Kohathite by birth, was for his holiness raised by God to exercise the priestly office; then to Zadok, the direct descendant of the great Phinehas, whom Solomon raised to be high priest on the treason of Abiathar, the descendant of Eli; and, above all, to our blessed Lord, the faithful and true, the Great High Priest, not after the order of Aaron, but the order of Melchizedek, before whom the priesthood of Aaron vanished away. Hannah had first sung of Him as the Anointed, and now He is promised as the High Priest.

LESSON XLI.

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON.

JUDGES xiii. 2—24.

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah ; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren : but thou shalt bear a son.

Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing :

For, lo, thou shalt bear a son ; and no razor shall come on his head : for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God : and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible : but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name :

But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt bear a son ; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing : for the child shall be a Nazarite to God to the day of his death.

Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah ; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field : but Manoah her husband was not with her.

And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman ? and he said, I am.

And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order * the child, and how shall we do unto him ?

And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing : all that I commanded her let her observe.

And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me,

* Treat.

I will not eat of thy bread : and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.

And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour ?

And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is Wonderful ? *

So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD : and He did wondrously ; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.

And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would at this time have told us such things as these.

And the woman bare a son ; and called his name Samson : and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

COMMENT.—Almost at the same time as Samuel the Nazarite was growing up in the tabernacle, another young Nazarite was born, and was being prepared, in the providence of God, to be a defender of the Israelites against the punishment that their sins were storing up for them. It is one of the strangest and saddest histories in the Bible, for while one Nazarite was blessed in all he did, the other made no good use of the gifts of the Lord ; and though he seems to have been meant, if we may so speak, to be a great type of the Saviour in His might, he turned aside from his high calling, and only showed the likeness, like the reflection of the sun in troubled waters, all broken and distorted. The beginning of his life was typical, for his birth was promised to his mother “by the message of an angel.” His parents were of the tribe of Dan, not of the part of the tribe that had migrated to the north, but of the original settlement between Judah and the Philistines. “Dan shall judge his people,” was to be fulfilled in him. The heavenly messenger came first to the mother alone, and bade her to prepare for the birth of the child, by herself observing the laws of the devoted Nazarites, drinking no wine, and being careful never to touch any-

* This is in the margin and is the correct translation, though “secret” is in the text.

thing that caused defilement, according to the Law, by being emblematic of sin, by connection with death or disease. When she had told her husband, he prayed that the angel might return, and teach them how to deal with the child who was to be given to them. The heavenly visitor came again, and vouchsafed to repeat to Manoah what had before been told to his wife, setting the child apart from all others as one who had a special work from the Lord.

Then followed a scene that shows us that the Angel or messenger was again not a ministering spirit, but a manifestation of God himself, the Word of God. For when, as in the appearance to Gideon, there was the desire to make ready a kid for Him who seemed in outward form a *man* of God, Manoah and his wife were told that it must not be as a meal, but as a sacrifice unto the Lord ; and when, still not understanding that He was more than human, the husband asked His name, the answer reminds us of that given to Jacob on his night of wrestling (Gen. xxxii. 29). His full name was only to be revealed by the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin whose name was Mary ; but a little more was told to Manoah than to his forefather. "Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is Wonderful?" "His name shall be called Wonderful," was four hundred years later the promise to Isaiah, and He whose name is Wonderful did wondrously, rising in the flame of the sacrifice on the rock to heaven, even as He had risen before in Gideon's altar fire, and as He would rise in His human body after His own great sacrifice.

Then Manoah knew they had seen a manifestation of God, and was overpowered with fear, thinking that none could see Him and live ; but his wife believed that the acceptance of the offering was a sure pledge of His favour, and, besides, the very promise implied their life. And she was right. Her son was born, and named by a word which we call Samson, but which was really *Shimshun*, probably from Shemesh, the Sun, for she might well believe that the boy so promised would be the Sun, the Light of Israel.

LESSON XLII.

THE CALL TO SAMUEL.

I SAM. iii. 1—21.

And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious * in those days ; there was no open vision.

And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see ;

And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep ;

That the LORD called Samuel : and he answered, Here am I.

And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I ; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not ; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I ; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son ; lie down again.

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I ; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down : and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD ; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak ; for thy servant heareth.

And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house : when I begin, I will also make an end.

For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth ; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged † with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee ? I

* It was very seldom that the LORD spake to men.

† Purified.

pray thee hide it not from me : God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

And Samuel told him every whit,* and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD : let him do what seemeth him good.

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.†

And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh : for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

COMMENT.—This history, one of the very first that we all know and love, because it tells of a holy childhood favoured by God, is believed to have taken place when Samuel, the young Nazarite of the Temple, was about twelve years old. It was at a time when little of the spirit of prophecy was vouchsafed to the Israelites ; the vision or revelation of God was shut up from them, for the priesthood was defiled, and no one at Shiloh seems to have been true and faithful in heart save the young child and the feeble old man, who had failed to restrain his sons, and who was so aged that he began to lose his sight. It seems as though his sons and grandsons had neglected him, for no one was near him at night but the child Samuel, where he was laid down to sleep in the chambers made for the priests in what is here called the Temple, but which was really the Tabernacle of the wilderness, only with walls instead of boarded enclosures. Most likely it was near morning, for the seven-branched lamp-stand or candlestick, which stood in the Holy Place, outside the Holy of Holies, was fed with fresh oil every evening, and it was nearly gone out—just as the Light of Grace had nearly gone out among the people of Israel—when, even as the Lord had of old spoken to Moses, so now He called Samuel by name. Samuel knew not what voice it was, and started up, thinking that it was Eli who had called him. Just so when children hear the commands of their parents or teachers, they do not know that it is really the Lord whom they obey or disobey.

It is worth noting what the child was like whom the Lord thus favoured out of all Israel. Observe that while his sleep was broken over and over again, and he still thought it was the blind old man

* Point.

† Be lost.

who called him, he showed no impatience, but ran as readily as ever with his "Here I am, for thou didst call me." A little fretfulness or neglect might have unfitted him for ever for the great work for which he had been set apart.

When his words, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," had been uttered, it was a very terrible revelation that followed, confirming the words that the man of God had before spoken, and foretelling the punishment of the wicked sons of Eli. Perhaps they had refused to believe that messenger. Now the Voice came out of the Tabernacle itself, where no one was, save their father and the child.

To the child Samuel himself it was a dreadful load to bear. He lay, no doubt in awe and grief, until morning, and then he feared to tell Eli, perhaps not only in the dread of grieving him, but from fear of the way in which the lawless Hophni and Phinehas might receive such tidings. But when Eli called on him to tell, he simply told the truth, and thus began his mission as a prophet of God. Eli took the sentence in meek resignation. He knew too well that it was deserved, and he did not fight against it: "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." There is a pattern for us of the blessed way in which to take chastisement! From that time Samuel was known to be a prophet by whom the Lord declared His will, and all Israel owned him, from Dan—the northern city, inhabited by the Danite colony who had robbed Micah of his teraphim—down to Beersheba, the most southern point of Judah towards the desert. This was the whole length of the land.

The books called those of Samuel, or sometimes the First and Second Books of Kings, were counted by the Jews as the first belonging to prophetic times. They seem to have been begun by Samuel himself, and afterwards continued in the schools or colleges of prophets which, as we shall find, he founded.

LESSON XLIII.

THE LOSS OF THE ARK.

I SAM. iv. 1—18.

The warnings at Mount Sinai and at Mount Pisgah had shown that, whenever the Israelites persisted in transgressing, their chastisement would increase in severity (Lev. xxvi., Deut. xxviii.). Hitherto the chief suffering had been from the forays of robber-tribes from the eastern frontier, but after many deliverances and many relapses into sin, an enemy was raised up more seriously bent on conquering and subduing than the unsettled wanderers who only wanted plunder. These were the Philistim, or, as we call them, Philistines, from whom the whole of Canaan acquired the name of Palestine. There had been Philistines in Abraham's time, and we are told that the nation came from Caphtor, which is believed to be the Island of Crete, and they are thought to have been of the European stock which came from Japhet, rather than Canaanites or of the Shemite (or Semitic) races of the desert. It was to avoid the Philistines that the Israelites had been brought through the eastern desert instead of by the direct road from Egypt, but the kings of Egypt were constantly at war with the Philistines and kept them down, so that for many years they did not molest the Israelites, except in the one attack that was beaten off by Shamgar and his ox-goad. But the power of Egypt fell, and that of the Philistines increased as fresh settlements joined them from Crete. Their dwelling-place was a fair breezy slope in the south, towards the Mediterranean, cutting off Judah, Simeon, and Dan from the sea-coast, and containing five principal and very beautiful cities, Ashdod, Askelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza. Each of these five had lesser towns subject to them, and formed, not a kingdom, but a confederation, which was governed by a council of the magistrates of each city. Their religion seems to have partaken more of the Eastern than of the Western idolatries, for their chief deities were Ashtaroth, Baal-zebub, the God of flies, Dagon and Derceto, male and female idols with human heads and fishes' tails, all of whom the Phœnicians likewise worshipped. These Philistines were great sailors, and were always desirous of capturing the Israelites to sell as slaves; they were able and fierce warriors, and, though not among the doomed nations of Canaan, were terrible enemies when recruited by fresh settlers from Crete, they began to attempt the conquest of the tribes.

Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer : * and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel : and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines : and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.

And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims : and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp.

And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us ! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore.

Woe unto us ! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

Be strong and quit † yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you : quit yourselves like men, and fight.

And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent : and there was a very great slaughter ; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

And the ark of God was taken ; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching : for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.

Now Eli was ninety and eight years old, and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he

* The Stone of He'p.

† Behave.

fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died : for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

COMMENT.—The Philistines advanced against Israel, and won a great victory over them at Aphek, in the tribe of Judah, not far from the fortress of Jebus, and killed four thousand men. There seems to have been no Judge at this time but feeble old blind Eli, and the people in their terror bethought themselves that of old they had had the victory wherever the Ark of the Covenant was. They had fallen so far that they forgot that it was the Lord who arose and scattered His enemies : there was no humiliation, weeping, or prayer, but they treated the Ark as though it were an idol or charm, and could in itself save them. Arks something like it were carried by the Egyptians, and they would do the same. *It* should save them. Not God, but the Ark.

Thus the elders of Israel sent to Shiloh to demand it. We can almost see the clamorous deputation, and the grief of the old High Priest, knowing well that this was presumption and sacrilege, sure to bring ruin, and all the doom denounced by the prophet and by the child Samuel ; yet by age and former weakness unable to make his voice heard, or withstand the two self-willed, irreverent sons, who, like Nadab and Abihu, made their way through the veil, and brought out that precious chest which had rested within its home at Shiloh since Eleazar placed it there ! Trembling for the Ark and trembling for his sons, the old man watched and waited under the burthen of his ninety-eight years while Israel hailed the Ark with a shout of triumph. There was no holy fear among them, only loud confidence. It was pleasanter to trust in the Ark than to find out their own sins, and so their cry rang out into the enemy's camp.

The Philistines, like most heathens, believed that each nation had its own gods, who fought for it, and that one deity was more powerful than another ; and thus, when they learnt that the Israelites were shouting at the coming of their God, they were dismayed, thinking that a powerful deity was come ; but they roused themselves to all the greater valour, and the sacrilegious superstition of Israel met its punishment, for the defeat was a total

and a dreadful one. Hophni and Phinehas were slain, and the greatest misfortune came on Israel that had ever yet befallen it, for the Ark of God was taken by the Philistines.

Then came the Benjamite, fleeing from the battle to the place where the blind old priest sat waiting, and watching though his eyes were blind, for news of his sacred charge and of his sons ! The messenger seems to have passed him by unobserved, but at the sound of the wailing in the city he sent for the man. He heard of the lost battle—he heard of his sons' death—but when he heard that the Ark was taken he fell back horror-struck, and his neck brake, and he died ! So ended the glory of Shiloh, the place where God first set His Name. If we will not use His Light, He takes it away. Thus He says, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my Name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people" (Jer. vii. 12). And hear the Psalmist's lamentation over this desolate time :—

So he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,
The tent which he had pitched among men,
And delivered his strength into captivity,
And his glory into the enemy's hand.
He gave his people over also unto the sword :
The fire consumed their young men,
And their maidens were not given to marriage ;
Their priests were slain with the sword,
And their widows made no lamentation.

This was especially true of Phinehas's wife, who in her grief and horror gave birth to a son and died immediately after, naming her babe Ichabod, "No glory"—for her last words were, "The glory has departed from Israel"—the glory of the Ark, and the priesthood, and the presence of the Lord in Shiloh.

LESSON XLIV.

THE ARK IN PHILISTIA.

I SAM. v.; vi. 1.

And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod.

When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with disease, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.

And it was so, that after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, with a sore disease.

Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.

So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the cry of the city went up to heaven.

And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

COMMENT.—There was nothing that it was so needful for Israel to learn as that—

As for all the gods of the heathen, they are but idols,
But it is the LORD that made the heavens.

Therefore, though God had for the sins of His people allowed Shiloh to be desolate, and the Ark, with the Commandments, Aaron's rod, and the pot of manna, to be taken by the Philistines, and to remain with them for seven dreary months of mourning at home, He yet made His power to be known.

The Philistines believed that their Fish-god, Dagon, had captured the Ark, which they supposed to contain the gods of Israel; and though they durst not break into the mysterious chest overlaid with gold, they placed it as a trophy in the temple of Dagon, at Ashdod. But when the temple was visited in the morning, Dagon's idol had fallen, and lay before the Ark. They lifted the image into its place, but the next day on the threshold lay the head and hands. Nothing remained but the fishy tail. And yet so obstinate and foolish was the Philistine belief in the sacredness of this helpless idol, that up to the time when the history was written—probably by Samuel—the threshold where these broken fragments had lain was viewed as so sacred that no one durst set foot on it! Meanwhile, the people of the city suffered from painful diseases; and it also appears that one of God's great armies of insignificant creatures was sent among them, and that their crops were ruined by multitudes of mice. At first they thought that the God of Israel specially hated Dagon, so they sent the Ark on to Gath, the country where the remains of the old Anakim or giants lived, but the disease and devastation followed it, and it was passed on to Ekron, which had a tutelary god of its own, Baal-zebub, "the Lord of Flies," but even before it arrived the plagues had come to Ekron, and the people of the place rose up and insisted that the Ark should not be brought among them.

So God's honour was declared among the heathen; and we can even see that it was for their good, for though as a nation the Philistines remained foes to Israel, yet we shall find the "Gittite," or man of Gath, and the Cherethite, or Cretan, joined to the chosen people as faithful soldiers and servants.

LESSON XLV.

THE RETURN OF THE ARK.

I SAM. vi. 2—21 ; vii. 1—2.

And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD ? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place.

And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty ; but in any wise return him a trespass offering : then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.

Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him ? They answered, Five golden jewels, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines : for one plague was on you all, and on your lords.

Wherefore ye shall make images for your disease, and images of your mice that mar the land ; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel : peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land.

Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts ? when he had wrought * wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed ?

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them :

And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart ; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer † by the side thereof ; and send it away, that it may go.

And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil : but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us ; it was a chance that happened to us.

And the men did so ; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home :

And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their disease.

And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, ‡ and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left ; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh.

And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley : and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.

And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood

* Worked.

† Box.

‡ The House of the Sun.

there, where there was a great stone : and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD.

And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone : and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.

And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

And these are the golden jewels which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD ; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Askelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one ;

And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel,* whereon they set down the ark of the LORD : which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Beth-shemite.

And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and three score and ten men : and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.

And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God ? and to whom shall he go up from us ?

And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD ; come ye down, and fetch it up to you.

And the men of Kirjath-jearim† came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long ; for it was twenty years : and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

COMMENT.—The Philistines, in their distress, called all their priests to tell them how to free themselves from the miseries that the presence of the Ark had brought them. They were resolved to send it away, but the priests and diviners enjoined that an offering should be made to atone for the trespass or offence that had been ignorantly committed against the Lord, whom they had learnt to believe as at least more mighty than their own god. This offering was to be a golden image commemorating the disease from which each city had suffered, and a golden mouse from every place where havoc had been made by these creatures. The priests enforced their advice by speaking of the effect, as seen in Egypt, of resisting this terrible God ; but they further proposed that, to see whether miracles

* Mourning.

† The City of the Woods.

truly followed it, and if it were God's will that it should return, it should be placed on a cart drawn by two cows that had never been yoked before, and would naturally be restive, and that their calves should be shut up at home. If the cows, against all nature, should draw the cart away from their home and their calves, then the Philistines would see clearly that it had verily been the Lord who afflicted them; if not, they would regard their misfortunes as common accidents of life. So the Ark was placed on the cart, and a chest besides, containing the golden figures offered by the cities and the numerous villages around them, and the cows, without a driver, went lowing on their way to Judah, the Philistines keeping in the distance to watch its course.

It was wheat harvest, and thus about the Feast of Weeks, when the reapers of the Levite town of Beth-shemesh, in the borders of Judah, lifted up their eyes, and saw the wonderful sight of the two cows bringing home the precious golden chest which had been lost for seven months. The creatures rested beside a great stone, and here the Levites took down the Ark, and (as it seems) the Philistines broke up the cart and offered the cows as a sacrifice, they being hallowed by the work they had done, and the stone was called the stone of Abel, or "mourning," probably because the Philistines there mourned for the affliction of their land, and entreated for it to be removed.

Thus it was that, all alone, without one priest or one defender, the Ark was delivered from the hands of the heathen without a human hand being raised; and thus both Israel and the Philistines learned the infinite power of Him who had placed His Mercy-seat on the Ark. Therefore it was that in the Psalm of praise composed some years later it is said: "Thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men." (Psalm lxxviii. 18.) And at every Feast of Weeks among the Israelites, at every Whitsuntide among Christians, have these notes of glory been sung, though now it is with the thought of a far greater captivity led captive, and of infinitely higher gifts received by Him of whom the Ark was the type.

The time for songs of joy was not come yet. The people of Beth-shemesh were full of bold curiosity. No one but the High Priest ever saw the Ark in its tabernacle, and even the Philistines

had not dared to look into it, but these men ventured to open it and pry into its contents. They were punished by a sudden stroke, by which it is supposed that seventy perished out of fifty thousand, who came thronging and curious to inspect the Ark with an idle gaze. Then the Bethshemites, alarmed, sent to Kirjath-jearim, a city of the Gibeonites, and the next large town on the way to Shiloh, to desire that the Ark might be moved on; and so it was, to the house of a man named Abinadab. If a Gibeonite, he had learnt to slave humbly in the sanctuary, and, full of awe, he consecrated his son Eleazar to keep the Ark, not to minister as a priest, but to guard it from profanation. For there was no taking it back to Shiloh. The place lay waste and desolate, and there were no priests to receive it there; for though Phinehas had left a son older than Ichabod, he was a mere infant; and the Philistines, with all the marauding nations on all sides, were overrunning the unhappy, God-forsaken country, so that no one durst gather the nation into one; and Kirjath-jearim, the "city of the woods," lying lonely and deep among the thick forests of Mount Jearim, was a fit place for the Holy Ark to lie hidden from its enemies during this time of mourning and chastisement.

LESSON XLVI.

SAMSON AND THE LION.

B.C. 1120.—JUDGES xiv.; xv. 1, 2.

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath,

and came to the vineyards of Timnath : and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand : but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

And he went down, and talked with the woman ; and she pleased Samson well.

And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion : and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat : but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

So his father went down unto the woman : and Samson made there a feast ; for so used the young men to do.

And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you : if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets* and thirty change of garments :

But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.

And he said unto them,

Out of the eater came forth meat,

And out of the strong came forth sweetness.

And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire : have ye called us to take that we have ? is it not so ?

And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not : thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee ?

And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted : and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she vexed him : and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down,

What is sweeter than honey ?

And what is stronger than a lion ?

And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

* Loose garments.

But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid ; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her ; therefore I gave her to thy companion : is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.

COMMENT.—While God was allowing the chastisement through the Philistines to weigh so heavily on His people, in His mercy He was preparing two defenders for them in the two young Nazarites, so nearly of the same age, fitted, as it seemed, the one to be their prophet and preacher, the other to be their champion and protector ; one for peace, and one for war. But it sometimes happens that instruments who seem prepared by God's gifts for His own especial work are allowed to misuse them. Our wills are left to turn to our good or evil, although God overrules the evil to bring about His ends. Thus Samson grew up with his marvellous strength, an especial endowment from the Spirit of Might, but he does not seem to have felt the call of duty it laid on him. Every gift must be used for something, and Samson seems not to have felt that his mighty strength must be intended to defend his fellow-countrymen. Instead of this, when he saw a Philistine maiden in Timnath, he insisted that his parents should obtain her for his wife. There was no rule against Nazarites marrying, but the pious Manoah and his wife might well be shocked that their dedicated son should choose a heathen Philistine woman ; not knowing that the injury he would suffer would be the only mode of stirring his light mind to enmity against the Philistines, and thus that the Lord was overruling his untamed self-will.

It was on the way to arrange this, that among the vineyards of Timnath, Samson, being left alone for a moment, was attacked by a lion, and under the impulse of the strength of the Spirit of the Lord, he destroyed the beast with such perfect ease that he never even told his parents. This journey was for the betrothal. On the way to the actual wedding feast, Samson found that in this land, flowing with milk and honey, a swarm of wild bees had made their nest in the skeleton of the lion, and he carried off some of the honey

for himself and his father and mother. Eastern wedding feasts are lengthy ceremonies, and during this one Samson put forth his riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat (*i.e.* food), and out of the strong came forth sweetness." His modest silence as to his own powers was forgotten, and he foolishly staked a heavy gift on the guessing or not guessing of his question, and then allowed the answer to be wiled out of him by the wife, who had been threatened by her kindred. He understood how it had been when the answer was given, and replied with a proverb; but he paid his forfeit at the expense of the Philistines of Ashkelon. Observe, that when the Spirit of the Lord is said to come on him, it is not the holy influence, but an access of that extraordinary strength that was a gift of the Holy Spirit. After this offence he went home to his father's house, leaving his faithless bride, who, with heathen indifference to the marriage tie, was given to the young man who had acted the part of bridegroom's friend, so that when Samson relented and came to visit her, he found that she had been given away.

[But through all this Samson showed a typical likeness to Him whom he ought to have imaged forth more fully. He went down to seek a Bride from among the nations, and on His way He overcame the roaring lion who seeketh whom he may devour. Then He gives the sweetness of His conquest to His people.]

LESSON XLVII.

SAMSON'S EXPLOITS.

JUDGES xv. 3—19; xvi. 1—3.

And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes,* and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

* Jackals.

And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.

Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

And he smote them hip and thigh* with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.

Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.

And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

And when he came unto Lehi,† the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.‡

And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore,§ which is in Lehi unto this day.

Then went Samson to Gaza. And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

* A proverb for completely overcoming.

† The lifting up of the jawbone.

‡ So called afterwards.

§ The well of him that called.

And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.

COMMENT.—The rage of Samson at the loss of his wife produced the effect that love of his country could not work. If men will not do God's will as His will, they still have to bring about His ends, but in sin, not in holiness. He who might have been a noble champion and leader against the enemies of God, had made friends with them in his lazy levity, and when they betrayed him he only tried to revenge himself, and in a dastardly and cruel way.

All the slopes of Philistia towards the Mediterranean are one sea of waving corn, and fire is so dreaded there that death is still the punishment for setting a field on fire even by accident. Samson trapped or caught by other means a multitude of the jackals that prowl and howl in flocks by night, and tying their tails together in pairs, with a torch between each pair of tails, let them loose into the standing corn. The devastation must have been as dreadful as a prairie fire! The Philistines, in revenge, burnt the house of the faithless wife and her father—the very punishment she had hoped to avoid when she betrayed the secrets of her mighty husband. Again Samson took his revenge—single-handed, as it seems; for the nation was motionless under the Philistine yoke, and he did not care for their deliverance, only for his own passions. He smote the enemy with a great slaughter, and then, as his own tribes were apparently afraid to shelter him, went and dwelt alone on the top of a great cliff not far from Bethlehem. The Philistines came to seize him, and called on the tribe of Judah to deliver him up to them, and as his had been an outrage in time of peace, not in open war, they consented. He made them swear not to fall on him themselves, and surrendered to them; but when the Philistines shouted at the sight of him, his strength and fury broke forth, and with no weapon but the jawbone of the fresh skeleton of an ass, he slew a thousand men.

Here was the fulfilment of the promise, "One man of you shall chase a thousand" (Josh. xxiii. 10). But Samson's song of praise

was in honour of himself, and not of God, and he called the place after the jawbone, as it seems, in a boastful spirit. Yet still Samson had faith. He did not swerve to idolatry, nor break his Nazarite vow, so when he chose to use them his wondrous gifts showed themselves; and when, faint and thirsty after his battle, he called on God for help, a miraculous fountain sprang forth—whether out of the jawbone or out of the place he had named from it is not quite clear. Though for his own needs, he had fought God's battles, and God blessed his prayer. It shows what he might have been! He seems to have lived a careless and easy life, judging Israel so far as sometimes to use his giant strength against the Philistines, but never delivering his people, and wasting his grandest gifts. He wandered into Gaza, the great Philistine city, for his own pleasure, and when the Philistines discovered his coming and shut the great gates of the town, expecting to secure him, he rose in the middle of the night and walked away with the gates, posts and all, upon his back, up to the top of the hill above Hebron.

[The Church has always seen in this exploit a likeness to the Saviour rising at midnight and bursting the gates of the grave. He deigned to mould His likenesses beforehand, not only in the good, but in the weak and headstrong; and Samson, even though failing in all his mission, still traced out beforehand the Power that hath broken the gates of brass and smitten the bars of iron asunder—not for Himself alone, but for His people.]

LESSON XLVIII.

SAMSON BETRAYED BY DELILAH.

B.C. 1140.—JUDGES xvi. 4—21.

And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs* that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies : now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.

And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies : tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.

And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death ;

That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head ; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my birth : if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

And she made him sleep upon her knees ; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head ; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass ; and he did grind in the prison house.

COMMENT.—Alas, alas ! the great Nazarite, instead of being the likeness of the Saviour, is the likeness of rebellious Israel. He seems to show, in one sad emblem, the ways of the people so often

* Moist fresh-twisted willow boughs.

delivered by the Spirit of the Lord, so often drawn away by their own weakness and wilfulness only to find themselves betrayed, and then, in spite of warning, returning to the temptation and sin, to their full and lasting ruin. Nor is he only the likeness of sinful Israel, but of every one who will not resist the snares of his own wishes and fancies. They will be sure to become his punishment by-and-by. Self-will, idleness, greediness, are Delilahs to children; dress and vanity, foolish books, and idle talk, to young women; drink, money, and many another evil, to men. If we return to a sin after a warning, there is little hope for us.

The wicked woman who so basely and cruelly betrayed the strong man who had given her his love, had this additional guilt, that, unlike her who had first led him aside in early youth, she was no Philistine, but a daughter of his own tribe of Dan, living at Sorek, close to his native place! Nobody but Judas Iscariot did so base a part as hers, when she sold the secret that she beguiled from his foolish affection to the enemies of his nation and hers! See, too, the mischief of the love that is given unworthily. Affection that is bestowed for mere outward charms, instead of being based on esteem, is always in danger of being thrown away. Samson distrusted, even while he yielded. He put her off with a falsehood three times to satisfy her, and each time she tried the experiment, while Samson knew not that the Philistines were hidden in the inner chamber to seize him. The first time he told her to bind him with the twisted wands of willow, the next time with new ropes; the third, his invention failing him, he came nearer the truth. The long locks of hair, never clipped from his birth—and he must have been about forty years old—were not worn loose and flowing, but plaited into seven great tresses, and, looking at the web or half-woven piece of cloth that hung down from the beam of the loom, he told her he should lose his strength if his hair were worked into it like so much yarn. Forthwith she wove it in—probably to his amusement—fastened it to the ceiling or floor with a strong pin, and then roused him with the cry that his enemies were upon him. He rose up, and, without seeming to feel it, carried off the cloth, pin and all. At last he was wearied out, and yielded up his secret—no doubt supposing an Israelite woman

could not betray him, and believing that no one could touch his hair without his consent. Little he thought that she would lull him to sleep, and cause a man to shave away the badge of his dedication, the pledge of the faith that, for all his weakness, he had kept whole ! Then, when by insults of her own the cruel woman had convinced herself that his might had departed from him, she called in the enemy. Weak and helpless in their hands, he could no longer defend himself, and in their cruel revenge they carried him to Gaza, the city he had once broken through so triumphantly, and blinded his eyes ; and there he was set in his captivity to the work of a slave.

All the corn in the East is ground between two millstones, the upper lodged on a sort of socket hollowed in the top of the lower, and moved round by the hand ; and this, in blindness, weakness, and captivity, was the task of the man who but for his own self-indulgent weakness might have been the glorious deliverer and leader of his country, the type of the Sun of Righteousness.

LESSON XLIX.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON.

B.C. 1140.—JUDGES xvi. 22—31.

Howbeit the hair of Samson's head began to grow again after he was shaven.

Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice : for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

And when the people saw him, they praised their god : for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house ; and he made them sport : and they set him between the pillars.

And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon

Now the house was full of men and women ; and all the lords of the Philistines were there ; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might ; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burying-place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

COMMENT.—While Samson was brought low and was grinding in his prison-house at Gaza, his hair began to grow again, and with it his strength to return. We must not look on his hair as a spell or charm with which his strength was connected. It was the token of his faith and obedience to the command given to his parents, and, great as had been his failures, he had never wilfully broken that Nazarite vow. He had been indolent, selfish, sensual—had only exerted himself for his own pleasure or his own anger, but he had never gone after idols, nor drunk wine or strong drink ; he had not fulfilled his mission, but he had not forsaken God, and therefore in his chastisement he was not forsaken of Him, but his miraculous strength was allowed to grow as he cherished the token of it.

There was great rejoicing among the Philistines at his capture ; and it should be observed that the praise of it was particularly ascribed to their god, to Dagon, who had fallen on his face before the Ark of the Lord, but whom they now believed to have won the victory. Therefore a great national feast was decreed, to take place in the temple of Dagon at Gaza, and as part of the festivities the blind Samson was to be led out to be shown to all the multitude, and mocked at in his fall and weakness. Now Samson had been before at Gaza, and, blind as he was, he knew the place. The old city of Gaza, of which ruins of stones and pillars still remain, was built on the side of a low, but steep, sharp hill, and the temple of Dagon appears to have been, after a not very unusual fashion of

Eastern building in mountainous countries, partly an excavation, partly a flat roof projecting from the side of the hill, and sustained by a portico of huge columns in front. Fragments of such pillars are to be found in the ruins, or built into walls, and used as door sills. On the flat roof, then, easily approached from the hill behind, would be a large number of the Philistines, within the temple many more, and Samson was placed between the two central columns of the portico, the main support of all. The Philistines watched the blind giant to deride him. He cried aloud to the Lord to give him back his strength, and grant him vengeance at his death.

Was it a right prayer? We cannot tell. It was not the Saviour's prayer, nor the martyr's, but the devout Israelite viewed the hostile nations as a Christian views the hosts of Satan, and Samson's cry involved the entreaty that he who had sinned, suffered, and repented, might be allowed in his death to fulfil the work he had neglected in his life, that of destroying the strength of the Philistines.

Then, clasping the two huge stone columns, he dragged them together. They yielded like hazel wands. The roof came crushing over him; and Dagon, and the priests and lords who thought they had triumphed over the LORD JEHOVAH, lay one mass of death and destruction among the hosts of the greatest, bravest, and noblest of the Philistines! And Samson, who at least had never broken faith, lay dead, his hands clasped about the pillars; and so great was the confusion and despair, that the kinsmen of the destroyer could venture into the midst of the enemy's country, bear away his body, and bury it in his forefathers' tomb, near the spot where his birth had been foretold. "And they were more that he slew at his death than all that he slew in his life." So he finished his strange, wild, broken, fitful likeness to Him who should "by death destroy the power of death, that is, the devil."

LESSON L.

THE RESTORATION BY SAMUEL.

B.C. 1140.—1 SAM. vii. 3—17.

And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car.*

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer,† saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

* The House of the Lamb.

† The Stone of Help.

And he went from year to year in circuit* to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

And his return was to Ramah ; for there was his house ; and there he judged Israel ; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

COMMENT.—The Nazarite of mighty strength was dead, and had worked no deliverance. What hope was there? The Nazarite of prayer was left, but he was a man of peace, bred in the holy place of Shiloh till twelve years old, when the destruction came, and then had been apparently in retirement at his father's home, the Levite city of Ramah. How should he deliver Israel? But grace can do more than strength. When Samuel was about thirty-two years old—and if we may trust the reckoning in the margin of our Bibles, the ruin of the temple of Dagon at Gaza was just accomplished, killing all the lords of the Philistines, so as to leave them no leader—Samuel came forth, and called on the people to put away their idols, and hold a great day of fasting, prayer, and humiliation, if yet they might win the favour of God.

Shiloh was no more, and the priesthood was out of sight, so Samuel gathered the people at Mizpeh, the watch-tower of Benjamin, and there was a public mourning for their sins, pouring out water as a visible sign that they ought to be dissolved in tears for their sins.

Their Philistine masters kept a jealous watch upon Israel, and hearing of this assembly came forth to break it up ; but in spite of the fears of the Israelites, they had hopes in Samuel's prayers. He was no priest, but by special appointment of God, he, a Levite, offered up a lamb entire as a fresh dedication of the *whole* people to God. While he was in the midst of the sacrifice, the enemy drew near. Samuel prayed on through the battle at his altar : "He called upon the mighty Lord when his enemies pressed him on every side, when he offered the sucking lamb ; and the Lord thundered from heaven, and with a great noise made his voice to be heard." (Ecclus. xlv. 15—16.) It was the first time since the victories of Jephthah that a battle had been gained by the Israelites, or that they had felt that God was for them. Though Shiloh was in ruins, He had not forsaken them. The place to which they pursued their

* Went round.

enemies was called Beth-car, perhaps from the lamb of the sacrifice (though it may have been an older name), and Samuel set up a stone in memorial of the victory, naming it Eben-ezer, "the Stone of Help." The Philistines were effectually driven back, and Israel was free again. The Nazarite of prayer had done what the Nazarite of strength had failed in ! And under him the Israelites began a real course of improvement. He not only judged Israel as their defender, but he did what none of the other Judges had apparently tried, he watched over the people to teach them devotion. Since Shiloh was no more, he established three altars, one at Mizpeh, the place of his victory ; one at Gilgal, where Joshua and the Ark had been so long ; and one at his home at Ramah ; and he went from one to the other year by year, acting as ruler, teacher, and priest. Moreover he established what were called Schools of the Prophets, the first apparently at Ramah. He was himself a Kohathite Levite, and is counted as the first of the prophetic system in Israel, so that the Jews numbered the Books bearing his name as the earliest in the division of the Prophets. The office of these prophets was rather to preach righteousness and sing praise to God. That which we call especially prophecy—*i.e.* the foretelling future events—was an inspiration given to a few ; the main body were trained from their youth up in the knowledge of the law of God, and in sacred music and song. They were not priests, and could not sacrifice, but they preached righteousness, led prayer, and tuned the voice of praise, and thus became the stronghold of religion through the sad days when the Ark was lost. It was probably owing to these Schools of the Prophets and the men that came from them, that Samuel's reformation was the most complete the Israelites ever had ; it cleared away idolatry, and was the first step to the chief glory of the nation, and it took all the influence of a corrupt court at last to turn the nation back to Baal and Ashtaroth.

LESSON LI.

THE ISRAELITES ASK A KING.

B.C. 1095.—I SAM. viii.

And^a it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.

Now the name of his firstborn was Joel ; and the name of his second, Abiah : they were judges in Beer-sheba.

And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways : now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee : for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

Now therefore hearken unto their voice : howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you : He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen ; and some shall run before his chariots.

And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties ; and will set them to ear^{*} his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries,[†] and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

He will take the tenth of your sheep : and ye shall be his servants,

* Till

† Make sweetmeat—probably with honey.

And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city.

COMMENT.—Samuel may have been about sixty years old when he placed his sons in charge at Beersheba to watch over the south, whilst he ruled at Ramah. But they fell into that universal Eastern vice of accepting presents and turning aside their judgment in favour of the givers, and the people came to Samuel demanding of him to make them a king like the other nations. Samuel was displeased—not selfishly, at the ingratitude to himself after his restoration of the almost ruined nation, and long peaceful government; but he felt, as Gideon had done before, that it was the peculiar glory of Israel to have the Lord for their king, and that this glory, in their foolish desire to be like other nations, they were throwing away. It was true that there were laws in Deuteronomy for the future king to govern by, but it was the duty of Israel to have waited for God's appointment, certainly not to come clamouring, imperatively requiring of Samuel to make them a king. Yet still they showed some dutifulness in trusting the choice to their Judge instead of making it for themselves, though the Lord spake to Samuel, saying that this was a rejection of His divine authority, of a piece with all their former conduct. In fact, it was the old craving for a visible leader to trust in, the same feeling that had induced them to make the calf to lead them instead of Moses, and take the Ark to battle; yet Samuel was bidden not to refuse them, but rather set before them the inconveniences that they would feel from having a king "like the nations," as they said. So he described the ways of an Eastern king, who used his power for his own pleasure, and not his people's good—the great household of wives and slaves, the violent calling away the choicest youths to form a body-guard, the claims upon labour and upon produce, such

as these free people had never known. Not even the very best of the kings of Israel seem altogether to have avoided all such abuses of power, and the worst fell into them continually. Samuel warned the people of all this, and when in their vanity and self-will they repeated their demand, Samuel was commanded to grant it, but he dismissed them to their homes until God should direct them to the intended king.

LESSON LII.

THE APPOINTMENT OF SAUL.

B.C. 1095.—I SAM. ix. 1—25.

Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power.

And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly : and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he : from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

And the asses of Kish Saul's father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses.

And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not : then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not : and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not.

And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return ; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us.

And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man ; all that he saith cometh surely to pass : now let us go thither ; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go.

Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man ? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God : what have we ?

And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver : that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way.

(Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer : for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.)

Then said Saul to his servant, Well said ; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was.

And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?

And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place.*

As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden.† Now therefore get ye up; for about this time ye shall find him.

And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place.

Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying,

To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.

Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is.

And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.

And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?

And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?

And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour,‡ and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons.

And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee.

And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day.

And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house.

COMMENT.—The people had returned home to wait, and meantime the king they desired was chosen. He was a Benjamite of that valiant little tribe which had never yet been entirely conquered,

* The hill above the town.

† Invited.

‡ The place of assembly in an inn or caravanserai.

and which was never addicted to idolatry. He was the son of a prosperous man, named Kish, owning large herds of cattle, and was himself of lofty height and noble countenance, in looks all that could be desired of a king, bold, high-spirited, and affectionate, with all that could make him loveable. By the strange course of providence by which God leads people up to the tasks He has appointed for them, Saul, who had set out from home merely to seek the stray herd of asses belonging to his father, found himself at a city of the land of Zuph, to the south-west of Benjamin, just when Samuel on his circuit was come thither to hold a festival with and judge the people. Perhaps we here see the beginning of the flaw in Saul's character, that he should be bold enough to come with a fee in his hand to ask the great inspired Judge of Israel which way his asses were gone. However, he is not condemned in Scripture, and it is never safe to think that anything is too trifling to come to God about, so it may be that in all their domestic duties the Israelites freely asked Samuel's inspired aid. The two words *seer* and *prophet* denote two offices. The older one of the seer seems to have been to answer by inspiration inquiries put to him, while the prophet was filled by God with a message to deliver; and the great body of prophets, who began with Samuel, were, when the book was written, so much more before the eyes of the people that it had become necessary to explain what seers were. Meantime God had revealed to Samuel that the future king was on his way, and he had prepared for it. Probably the festival had begun by Samuel's offering a sacrifice. Then, after the sacrificial portions had been burnt, he left the rest to be prepared, bidding the cook set aside the shoulder—his own portion, as acting as priest—for a guest yet to come. Then he went and sat in the city gateway, to act as judge and ruler, and while he was there, and as he rose to join the feast, Saul drew near among the rest, with his borrowed quarter-shekel, to ask about his asses. The secret voice of God declared that this grand-looking wayworn traveller was the man; and after setting his mind at rest about the asses, the prophet told him that he was the "desire of all Israel"—the man to whom all looked! Entirely unprepared, Saul humbly spoke of his own tribe as the least, sprung

from the youngest son, and mown down by the great slaughter of Gibeah, and his own family as obscure ; but he could not resist the grand old prophet, the first man in Israel, who took him up the sacred hill, outside the gates where the sacrifice had been offered. Close by was one of the great empty Eastern caravanserais or halting-places for travellers, and here the special feast was spread for Samuel and about thirty invited guests, the chief personages at the place. Above all these did Samuel place the wondering Saul, with the shoulder, the prime portion, before him ; and after the meal was over, Samuel took him to the house where he himself slept, and according to the custom in the heats of Palestine, his bed was spread on the top of the house.

LESSON LIII.

THE ANOINTING OF SAUL.

B.C. 1095.—I SAM. ix. 26, 27 ; x. 1—16.

And they arose early : and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad.

And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.

Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance ?

When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah ; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found : and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son ?

Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Beth-el, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine :

And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread ; which thou shalt receive of their hands.

After that thou shalt come to the hill * of God, where is the garrison †

* Gibeah.

† A fort with soldiers in it.

of the Philistines : and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them ; and they shall prophesy : *

And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.

And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee ; for God is with thee.

And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal ; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings : seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.

And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart : and all those signs came to pass that day.

And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him ; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish ? Is Saul also among the prophets ?

And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father ? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets ?

And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place.

And Saul's uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye ? And he said, To seek the asses : and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel.

And Saul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you.

And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not.

COMMENT.—In the morning Samuel called Saul, and, sending his servant on before him, made known to him the office to which he was appointed. The being anointed with holy oil had hitherto been the right of the priests alone. The oil used by Moses, chiefly made of olive-oil, had been minutely described on Mount Sinai, and there were strict commands not to mix any for any other purpose. It was the outward visible sign of being endowed with God's Holy Spirit for some especial and sacred purpose. First it belonged to the priest, the sacrificer, as in Aaron's case, and next it was to endow the ruler with power to govern, and render his person sacred. In each case it was typifying how the coming Saviour

should be anointed with the Holy Ghost to be Priest and King ; and, as we have seen, Harinah's song had already spoken of the greatness of the Anointed, the Messiah or Christ.

So Saul bent his lofty head to receive the holy oil—still so bewildered, that by way of assuring him that all had not been a dream, the prophet told him exactly all that should befall him on his way home, and whom he should meet, and what they should say to him.

Gibeah means "a hill," and thus it was when he should come to his own home, that the Holy Spirit who had come upon him in the anointing should change him altogether in heart. There he would meet with a band of the Schools of the Prophets, with instruments of music, and feeling impelled to join in their holy hymns of praise he would join them, and would remain in their company till Samuel came ; thus being set apart for a time in a sort of devotional retirement, in preparation for the great work that was laid upon him ; and in their solemn sacred musical procession he would go to the great holy place by the Jordan at Gilgal.

It is plain that Saul had not been noted for piety, since it was regarded as such a wonder that he should be among the prophets. "But who is their father?" was the answer. Is not God the father of the prophets? Cannot He make even Saul one of them?

LESSON LIV.

THE CHOICE OF SAUL.

B.C. 1095.—I SAM. x. 17—27 ; xi. 1—11.

And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh ;

And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you :

And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations ; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.

And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.

When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken : and when they sought him, he could not be found.

Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.*

And they ran and fetched him thence : and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.

And Saul also went home to Gibeah : and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.

But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.

Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead : and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.

And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel.

And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel : and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee.

Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people : and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept.

And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field ; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh.

And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, To morrow, by that time the sun be hot, ye shall have help. And the messengers came and shewed it to the men of Jabesh ; and they were glad.

* Among the baggage.

Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you.

And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together.

COMMENT.—Samuel had to make the chosen king known to the people. He called them together at the watch-tower, Mizpeh, and, to make it clear that Saul was not his choice but God's, he caused lots to be cast: first between the twelve tribes; and then, when Benjamin had been taken, between the families of that tribe. Saul, in awe of the office that was destined for him, as he saw the lot coming nearer and nearer, fled and hid himself among the baggage heaped up round the camp, and was only found by special direction from the Urim and Thummim, when his name was drawn. There then he stood, a very king in appearance, his grand head and shoulders towering above all the rest of the people, and, as Samuel pointed to him, there was a cry, "God save the king." They wanted a king "like all the nations," and they had one equal to that of any nation in grandeur of look and bearing, and in a native bravery and generosity that well deserved love and honour. Samuel then wrote the law, establishing Israel as a kingdom, on a roll of parchment, and placed it either before the Ark or in the old Tabernacle, and the people dispersed; but it was only a company of brave and dutiful men who followed Saul to his home at Gibeah—the more unruly and worthless would not own the new king; who on his side quietly returned to his father's fields, waiting for an opportunity of winning the people's trust, and thus bringing them to own him as king. After a time the Ammonites on the eastern border attacked Israel, as in the days of Jephthah, and began by summoning the frontier city of Jabesh-gilead to surrender to them, on the terrible terms that every man's right eye should be put out, so as to hinder him from aiming the spear. A week's respite was granted, and the besieged sent messengers to entreat for aid, but they seem not to have sent to Saul, who was coming in from the field when he learnt the tidings. At once inspired to defend his people, he sent out a token to all Israel, namely, part of the flesh of the

oxen he had killed. Wherever a fragment of those oxen was shown the brave left home to join Saul, and at the head of an army he hurried to Jabesh, and arrived just as their week of grace was over. In the battle that followed, the Ammonites were so scattered that no two were left together! Thus honourably did Saul fight his way to his kingdom.

LESSON LV.

SAMUEL'S WARNING.

B.C. 1095.—I SAM. xi. 12—15; xii. 1—7, 13—25.

And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death.

And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel.

Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.

And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD: and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you.

And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day.

Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe* to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.

And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand.

And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.

And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced † Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.

Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers.

* A present made to a person in authority to buy his favour or hinder him from seeing on which side the right lies.

† Put forward.

Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired ! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you.

If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God :

But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.

Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes.

Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain ; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king.

So Samuel called unto the LORD ; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day : and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not : for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.

And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not : ye have done all this wickedness : yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart ;

And turn ye not aside : for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver ; for they are vain.

For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake : because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.

Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you : but I will teach you the good and the right way :

Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart : for consider how great things he hath done for you.

But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.

COMMENT.—In the flush of joy at Saul's great victory the people unanimously proclaimed him king at Gilgal, the place of assembly on the banks of the Jordan, where he would cross on his way back from the rescue of Jabesh-gilead. They would have put to death those who opposed him, but his generous spirit forbade any one to suffer.

Then Samuel stood forth. We may picture to ourselves the great old Levite, his long unshorn Nazarene hair flowing white far below his shoulders, and his linen ephod girding him, as he rose up among all the loud acclamations to speak his solemn warning to Israel and their king. He had not so spoken when Saul was afraid of his great office, and when Israel would not acknowledge

him, but now, in the time of exultation, he spoke. First, both as one about to resign his government and also that they might see that nothing he said came of self-interest, he called on any man in the whole assembly who could accuse him of oppression or injustice to come forward and declare it, in the presence of the Lord and His anointed, the special title of the king.

When no one had any misdeed to allege against the Judge who had ruled them for at least twenty-two years, he bade them stand still and listen, while he recounted to them the story of their nation. He went through all that had befallen them from the first, how every stage in their history was the work of the Lord, how he had appointed Moses and Aaron, and all the Judges one after another, and how the safety of the nation had always depended on its obedience. Now, by way of getting, as it were, farther off from this immediate hand of God, the Israelites had asked for a king, and the victory their king had gained made them think that in him they had at last the charm that would give success to their arms. But Samuel tells them, they were just as dependent on the Lord their God as ever they were before. If they and their king were obedient and faithful, then they would prosper; if not, their king would not save them. Then, by way of showing them how close to them was God's power, and how little they or their king could resist it, at the word of Samuel thunder and rain were sent. It was the time of wheat harvest, namely, the space between the Passover and the Feast of Weeks. Rain never fell except at the two regular rainy seasons, the former rain after the sowing, and the latter rain before the ripening, so that the sight and sound of rain and thunder were very terrible to the congregation of Gilgal, and completely proved to them that not the most regular course of nature can resist His will for a moment. They cowered in fear, and could only entreat Samuel, whom they had cast off, to pray for them. His answer encouraged them. All they had to do, whether with kings or without, was to be obedient and serve God; and for his own part, he would have deemed it an absolute sin against God to cease to pray for the people for whom he had toiled so long, and whom indeed he had brought back to be a nation again instead of a collection of tribes fast falling apart. How like the

Israelites we are, when we fancy that in other circumstances we should do better ! Perhaps they come, and then we find that the change must be, not in things around, but in ourselves.

Thus it was that, long after, God spoke by the mouth of the prophet Hosea, "I gave them a king in mine anger"—(Hosea xiii. 13)—a king such as they asked for themselves—like the men who ruled other nations, brave and showy, but proud, jealous, and headstrong.

LESSON LVI.

SAUL'S FIRST DISOBEDIENCE.

B.C. 1093.—I SAM. xiii. 1—14.

Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,*

Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Beth-el, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent.

And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.

And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven.

When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait,† (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the

* Probably in the second year of his reign.

† In difficulty.

burnt offering, behold, Samuel came ; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash ;

Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD : I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly : thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee : for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

But now thy kingdom shall not continue : the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.

COMMENT.—Though Samuel had delivered Israel from the Philistines, still they had garrisons, or parties of soldiers, stationed in rocky fortresses, especially in the tribes of Judah and Benjamin ; and, in the second year after his election, Saul resolved to endeavour to clear the land of them. So he collected a troop of three thousand men, and took the command of two thousand himself, giving the other thousand to his brave young son Jonathan.

With these thousand Jonathan suddenly attacked and drove out the Philistines who held the fort in Geba, not far from his home at Gibeah. This beginning of a war greatly enraged the Philistines, and they began to collect a huge army to put down the new king and his presumption. Saul and Samuel upon this called upon the whole of the fighting men to meet them at Gilgal, which, being on the Jordan, was the most convenient rallying-point for those on both sides. There Saul was to collect his men, and in a week's time Samuel would come, celebrate a sacrifice, and send him forth with the blessing and direction of the Lord. As Samuel had told him at his anointing, "Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal, and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. Seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do." (1 Sam. x. 8.) It is not clear whether this original command was the one in force, or whether Samuel had freshly made the appointment.

But Saul's waiting at Gilgal was a great trial of patience. The Philistines, fierce and angry, were in his own late camp at Michmash, and in such numbers that the Israelites had been seized with deadly terror ; his three thousand men were dwindling fast away ; and of the others, some fled across the river to the land of Gad and Gilead, some hid in the caves of the mountains, the few who were with him followed him trembling, and still Samuel came not. He waited the seven days, and still there was no Samuel ! An impetuous, eager man, Saul felt delay intolerable, and expected the enemy to advance upon his army thinned by desertion. It was the very trial that his temper could least brook. Other kings, in other nations, were the chief sacrificers. Why should not he shake himself free of the old man who ruled over him, and be a king indeed, rallying his people round him, and acting as their head in religion as well as in war ? So he called for the sacrifices and offered them with his own presumptuous hand—though (as afterwards appears) he might have had the aid of the hereditary high priest. Even as he finished the sacrifice, Samuel appeared, and called him to account. Saul did not deny that he had done wrong, but he excused it. "I forced myself," he said, as one driven by necessity, almost throwing the blame on Samuel himself. The answer was grave and sad. Saul had not kept those conditions of strict obedience on which his reign depended. He had shown himself wanting in patience, and hasty to intrude into the offices of religion. He and his line were not the right kings for Israel, and therefore his dominion should not be lasting ; the rule should not pass to his heirs, but the Lord had already sought Him a man after His own heart to be the father of a line of kings. There was, in truth, a family at Bethlehem, among whom should arise one with the patience, faith, and obedience that Saul failed in.

LESSON LVII.

JONATHAN'S VENTURE.

B.C. 1094.—I SAMUEL xiv. 1—15.

Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father.

And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men;

And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone.

And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of the one was Bozez,* and the name of the other Seneh.†

The forefront of the one was situate northward over against Michmash, and the other southward over against Gibeah.

And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.

And his armour-bearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart.

Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them.

If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them.

But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us.

And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves.

And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armour-bearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armour-bearer, Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel.

And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armour-bearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armour-bearer slew after him.

* Shining.

† Either a tooth or a thorn.

And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armour-bearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half-acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow.

And there was a trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.

COMMENT.—After Samuel had spoken the sentence upon Saul, a time of great distress came on Israel. Saul had provoked the Philistines, but was not strong enough to resist the overpowering force they brought upon him. He had gone back to his rocky home at Gibeah, where Samuel was with him, and the high priest, Eli's grandson, with the ephod, containing the Urim and Thummim, and the ark of the covenant itself brought from Kirjath-jearim; for Gibeah seems to have been the only safe place left in all the country, and there were only six hundred men to guard that. The camp of the Philistines was on the opposite hill, and their bands of plunderers were to be seen winding along the valleys, and driving back the spoil. Moreover, following the policy described in Deborah's song, they had taken away all the weapons of the Israelites, and deprived them of all their smiths, so that they were forced to come into Philistia to get their tools for husbandry sharpened. No one even in the little camp at Gibeah had a sword or a spear but Saul and Jonathan. The rest had only axes and ox-goads—strong poles ten feet long, with an edge like a chisel at the end—such as Shamgar had once slain 600 men with. But all was discouragement when Saul had in his self-will and impatience lost the favour of God, and knew that if he reigned, it would be only for his own lifetime—he might not found a family. The hope with which he had been chosen seemed to have passed away—when, behold, the first brave effort for deliverance came from the very person on whom, though innocent, Samuel's sentence seemed to weigh most heavily, namely, Saul's eldest son, Jonathan.

Jonathan had not sinned, so his heart was free to dare; and though he knew he was not to be king, his love for his people and for the honour of God filled him with zeal; and thus there is no hero to be found shining with more pure and unselfish fame than Jonathan the son of Saul.

The stronghold of Saul at Gibeah and the camp of the Philis-

tines at Michmash were divided by a passage or pass—that is, a long winding gorge or ravine, called in the East a *wady*—shut in by nearly perpendicular cliffs, with a flat space above : on one side named the “Shining,” no doubt from the white chalk of which they were composed ; on the other by a word either referring to their sharpness or to the acacia thorns growing on them.

Along this gorge Jonathan with his attendant crept secretly, at first, it appears, only to reconnoitre ; but by and by, as he beheld the careless ease of the enemy, a thought of daring enterprise came upon him. He and his armour-bearer would endeavour to surprise the whole camp. “There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few,” said Jonathan. Had it not been promised that one man should put a thousand to flight ? He had the secret of courage and victory. Still, in order to be certain whether he were doing the will of God, he resolved that only if the Philistines should call to him to come up he would go ; if they only shouted to him to wait for them to seize him, he would return. But when he and his armour-bearer made themselves visible, there was a shout of derision at the Hebrews creeping out of their caves and holes, and the Philistines called to them, “Come up, and we will tell you something”—deeming them wandering peasants. It was the token Jonathan waited for, A mountaineer from his birth, he climbed up the crags, and in a moment, with his one attendant, fell upon the utterly unprepared enemy, who of course thought a whole troop were upon them ; and while twenty men were actually slain by these two, there was a trembling or panic throughout the whole camp, and no one had the perception to turn and see how few the assailants were. The terror was as complete as that which Gideon’s night attack had spread among the Midianites.

LESSON LVIII.

THE ROUT OF MICHMASH.

B.C. 1094.—I SAMUEL xiv. 16—35.

And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked ; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another.

Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armour-bearer were not there.*

And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel.

And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased : and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand.

And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle : and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great discomfiture.

Moreover the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp from the country round about, even they also turned to be with the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan.

Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle.

So the LORD saved Israel that day : and the battle passed over unto Beth-aven.

And the men of Israel were distressed that day : for Saul had adjured * the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food.

And all they of the land came to a wood ; and there was honey upon the ground.

And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped ; but no man put his hand to his mouth : for the people feared the oath.

But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath : wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth ; and his eyes were enlightened.

Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint.

* Laid an oath on.

Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land : see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened,* because I tasted a little of this honey.

How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?

And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon : and the people were very faint.

And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew them on the ground : and the people did eat them with the blood.

Then they told Saul, saying, Behold the people sin against the LORD, in that they eat with the blood. And he said, Ye have transgressed : roll a great stone unto me this day.

And Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people, and say unto them, Bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay them here, and eat ; and sin not against the LORD in eating with the blood. And all the people brought every man his ox with him that night, and slew them there.

And Saul built an altar unto the LORD : the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD.

COMMENT.—Saul had his sentries in his camp at Gibeah, where he sat under a pomegranate tree. Suddenly they saw a strange disturbance in the opposite camp. The Philistines seemed to be beating down one another and melting away ! The king, in his amazement, first demanded who was missing in his little army. His six hundred men were soon told over, and nobody was wanting but Jonathan and his armour-bearer ! Then the king called for the high priest that he might obtain direction from the Lord ; but as the noise and confusion among the enemy increased, he again lacked patience, and broke off his inquiry with hasty disrespect. In truth, his brave son had won the victory for him. The Philistines, not knowing who hurt them, were striking at each other ; and the Israelites in the camp, who had either joined them as allies or been captured by them as slaves, turned upon them, while all the rest of the people, who had hid themselves in the thickets and caves of Mount Ephraim, took heart and rushed out to complete the discomfiture of the flying enemy.

Saul saw that the honour of the day had been gained without him. He was carried along by the passionate eagerness that had made him break off his inquiry of the Lord ; he laid the men under a

* I have been refreshed.

curse if they should wait to take food before pursuing the enemy. Then the battle, the flight, and the slaughter went on, as the Philistines fled stumbling among the mountain paths—some eastward to Beth-aven, some towards their own land, down the gorge of the gazelles at Aijalon, the scene of Joshua's miracle. But on the Israelites following after them, hunger and thirst began to tell, and they grew too faint and weary to follow up the victory. Jonathan, who had not heard the prohibition, was exhausted like the rest, and as they passed through a wood truly flowing with honey from the wild bees' nests on the branches of the trees, he took a little with the rod in his hand, and was at once refreshed. One of those at hand told him of his father's command, and he lamented it, saying how much more complete the victory would have been if the pursuers had been allowed to regain strength by taking food.

And when at Aijalon their exhaustion forced Saul to call a halt, their hunger was such that they flew upon the cattle they had taken from the Philistines, and began to slay, cut up, and eat with savage haste, regardless of the law as to the pouring forth of the blood, and no doubt wastefully. To prevent this, Saul raised a large stone like an altar, and commanded that all beasts should be slain upon it; and the people obeyed. But though the great victory was gained, it was maimed and rendered imperfect by his self-will.

LESSON LIX.

THE RASH VOW OF SAUL.

B.C. 1094.—I SAMUEL xiv. 36—52.

And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee. Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God.

And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day.

And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day.

For, as the LORD liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him.

Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee.

Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken : but the people escaped.

And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken.

Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die.

And Saul answered, God do so and more also : for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.

And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid : as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground ; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not.

Then Saul went up from following the Philistines : and the Philistines went to their own place.

So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines : and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them.

And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them.

Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melchi-shua : and the names of his two daughters were these ; the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal :

And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz : and the name of the captain of his host was Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.

And Kish was the father of Saul ; and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.

And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul : and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him.

COMMENT.—The stay that had been made necessary by the hunger of the pursuers lasted till night, and Saul wished to hasten on and attack the fugitive Philistines by night, so as to complete his victory. The people were willing, but the high priest, Ahiah, insisted that the inquiry through the Urim and Thummim, which had been so disrespectfully broken off in the morning, should be resorted to. But in vain he sought an answer. No manifestation was vouchsafed. It was understood that some transgression must

be the cause of this silence, and Saul with his usual vehemence declared that the guilty person should die, were it himself or Jonathan. After commending the cause to the decision of the LORD, lots were cast, and unerringly came home to Jonathan, who then remembered the honey he had eaten in ignorance of the oath of his father. The evil had been not in Jonathan's infraction of the command he had never heard, but in Saul's having guarded his command with a curse—in fact, taking God's name in vain. But Saul did not see this, and at once sentenced Jonathan, the noble and the dutiful, to die—just as Achan the sacrilegious thief had died; indeed, it hardly seems unjust to suppose that he was jealous of the brave son who had really gained the victory, and without his orders. He could not bear Samuel's control: how could he bear Jonathan's glory? However, the Israelites perceived the injustice and savage barbarity of the sentence, and rescued Jonathan from his father. It was repentance and atonement for the sinful oath that were required; not the death of him who had unwittingly transgressed. This dissension ended the pursuit, and the Philistines returned to their own land, not utterly crushed, as they might have been—only driven back.

Such was the consequence of Saul's impatience and disobedience—a maimed victory, only showing what might have been! Still it established his power; and though Jonathan was the real hero, and had the people's hearts, his duty to his father was so perfect that he was the most obedient of his father's subjects, when Saul "took the kingdom," and ranked as a king, so that his family are here enumerated—at this time consisting of two daughters and two sons besides Jonathan. Especially noticed is Abner, the captain of his host, a man of great valour and resolution—a good soldier, but not a religious man. He was the son of Ner, brother of Kish, Saul's father, and supported the house of Saul with all his might. Under him a trained army began to be gathered of all the most valiant men of Israel, and there was a course of successes against the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Edomites, and Moabites, and the kings of Zobah, a people who lived on the Syrian border, to the north-east.

LESSON LX.

THE COMMISSION TO SAUL.

B.C. 1079.—I SAM. xv. 1—12.

Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel ; now, therefore, hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not ; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah.

And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley.

And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them : for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.

And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them : but everything that was vile and refuse,* that they destroyed utterly.

Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying,

It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king : for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel ; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place,† and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal.

COMMENT. — Several years had passed, and Saul had been allowed to become thoroughly master of the army and nation before God put him to another trial. There was a message sent him by Samuel, now a very aged man, reminding him of the anointing which made him God's chosen officer, and bound him to do His bidding. That bidding was the fulfilment of an old prophecy, the execution of a sentence long deferred. The savage Amalekite

* Good for nothing.

† A monument in honour of his victory.

robbers, who had cruelly hunted the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, smiting the stragglers and cutting off the faint and weary till they were defeated at the battle of Rephidim (Exod. xvii.), had then been laid under sentence of perpetual war, which had been repeated in Moses' last charge (Deut. xxv. 17), and Balaam had foretold that though Amalek was the first of the nations, his latter end should be that he perish for ever ; and, moreover, that Israel's *king* should be higher than Agag, "the burner," the title of the chief of the Amalekites. So now that after 400 years Israel *had* her king, he was to execute the judgment so long heaped up for them. To attack, by God's commission, and therefore with security of victory, was an order that Saul and his warriors would gladly obey ; but the trial was this :—They were not to take any plunder, no slaves, no cattle, no royal prisoners to do them honour. Everything Amalekite was to be utterly destroyed and slain. The cattle and the treasures were the polluted fruit of robbery, and captives would have brought in their own lawless spirit. At any rate there was to be an entire destruction done upon the savage race who deserved to be swept off the earth.

The conquest was the easiest part of the command. Saul gathered his army and ravaged the land : but neither he nor his warriors could keep their hands from the plunder. Pity would have been misplaced where God had forbidden pity, but that theirs was not such a feeling is plain, since their disobedience was only shown in keeping to themselves what they valued—the choicest cattle and the chieftain himself. And thus, though Amalek never became dangerous again as a nation, some persons escaped : it was by the hand of an Amalekite that Saul himself died a few years later, and by the intrigues of an Amalekite in after ages that the Jews in the Persian Empire had almost been destroyed.

There was one tribe, however, to whom Saul rightly gave warning, namely, the Kenites—that wandering branch of Midianites from whom Moses' wife had sprung, who had been the guides of Israel in the wilderness, and had produced Jael.

Saul's disobedience was revealed to Samuel by God Himself : "It repenteth me that I have made Saul king"—the same words used of man before the Flood—expressing that it was a failure. And

Samuel was sent to sentence him. The prophet, after praying all night long for Saul, followed the victorious army, first to Carmel, a place in the south of Judah, whence, after setting up a stone in honour of his victory, Saul had gone on to the great gathering-place at Gilgal, on the Jordan.

LESSON LXI.

THE SENTENCE UPON SAUL.

B.C. 1079.—I SAMUEL xv. 13—35.

And Samuel came to Saul : and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD : I have performed the commandment of the LORD.

And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites : for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God ; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel ?

And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go, and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD ?

And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

And Samuel said,

Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,

As in obeying the voice of the LORD ?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

And to hearken than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,

And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD,

He hath also rejected thee from being king.

And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned : for I have transgressed the

commandment of the LORD, and thy words : because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

Now, therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD.

And Samuel said unto Saul,

I will not return with thee :

For thou hast rejected the word of the LORD,

And the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.

And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

And Samuel said unto him,

The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day,

And hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.

And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent :

For he is not a man, that he should repent.

Then he said, I have sinned : yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God.

So Samuel turned again after Saul ; and Saul worshipped the LORD.

Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past.

And Samuel said,

As thy sword hath made women childless,

So shall thy mother be childless among women.

And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

Then Samuel went to Ramah ; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul.

And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death ; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul : and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.

COMMENT.—Saul, in the self-will that would submit to no guidance, came forth to meet Samuel, boasting how well he had fulfilled God's command, hoping to slur over his disobedience in the honour of the victory. But such a victory was no honour, and Samuel's simple question put him to shame in a moment. If he had really obeyed further than suited his own pleasure, what was the meaning of all the sounds of oxen and sheep with which the camp re-echoed ? Saul, like a man resolved to show no misgivings, merely answered that it was the plunder of the Amalekites, of which the best had been reserved for a sacrifice. Observe, while Saul almost insolently ignores Samuel's right to find fault, he yet seeks excuse. It was the *people*, he said, not himself, that had taken the spoil. Moreover, it was for an offering to the "Lord *thy* God,"—as though Samuel ought to have been gratified. With this answer

the king was walking away as one who had done with the subject, but the grey-haired Nazarite held him back to hear God's message, and he sullenly stood still to listen. Then Samuel reminded him how in the days of his mean estate God had sought him out and raised him up to do His will, and how He had given him a special commission—which he had not fulfilled. Obstinate in argument, Saul still averred that he had done his work; he had killed the Amalekites, and made their king a captive, and that it was the people who had taken the plunder—and for a sacrifice. But there the great Levite's voice rose into the inspired chant of prophecy, as he spake the words that have been the warning of thousands ever since—namely, that no offering is so acceptable to God as obedience, and to do His will is far more than any outward sacrifice.

Multitudes have been like Saul, and have thought they could atone for missing the one duty they do not like by fine sounding gifts or observances that they do like; but to all God's answer is the same, that "to obey is better than sacrifice," and that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry." The words might touch Saul the more, that he was at least zealous against idols, and had been exterminating the wizards and witches, who seem to have crept in from the Philistines, and used charms and spells to foretell the future. Great words were these, to be dwelt on again and again in Scripture, perhaps most notably in the 40th Psalm, where the singer, meaning to set forth his own desire to obey, has been inspired to express the purpose with which He who alone obeyed perfectly offered the one All-sufficient Sacrifice.

At the sentence that, as he had rejected God, so God had rejected him, Saul was overwhelmed; and, as the readiest way to put an end to the scene, owned that he had done wrong, but it was the people's fault. Would not Samuel return? He was evidently afraid that if Samuel's displeasure were known, the people would rise against him. But Samuel continued stern against his semblance of friendship and worship. Saul tried to hold him back, and thus rent his mantle. Then Samuel did turn, to assure him that this was a symbol of the way the kingdom should be rent from him, and given to one who was holier than he. Nor need he hope to change the doom by the mockery of an offering of the plundered

cattle. God, the Strength of Israel, was not a man to change His mind and purpose. Samuel repeated the very words with which Balaam had told Balak that his offerings of bullocks and rams could never bribe the Lord to break His covenant to Israel. Still, Saul, anxious to keep up his credit with the people, continued his entreaties, and Samuel, who had fulfilled his commission, and truly loved him so as to hope that he might yet be pardoned even if his sin were punished, did consent to return to hallow the festival at Gilgal. But first the spot must be purged by the death of the savage robber-chief, "the burner," whose life Saul had saved, not in kindness, but in vanity.

In those days a captive in war could only be a slave—generally, if royal, blinded or maimed, to hinder escape, like the seventy chiefs, without thumbs or great toes, who crept under Adonizedek's table for their food. Agag's tribe of desert robbers, his cities, wives and children, were all destroyed, and life could be of little value to him, as he evidently felt when he came towards Samuel "delicately"—*i.e.* probably with the stately defiant tread of a Bedouin chief. "Surely the bitterness of death is past;" he cared not what befell him now. Samuel would not parley with him, but simply as God's messenger pronounced sentence on his many cruelties, and (as Josephus makes clear) handed him over to the executioner. Then the sacrifice was held, and Samuel went back to the school of prophets at Ramah, never again to seek Saul—though he continued to mourn and pray for him with unwearying love. But there is a self-will which makes even the holiest prayers vain, or return again to the bosom of the intercessor.

LESSON LXII.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID.

B.C. 1068.—I SAMUEL xvi. 1—13.

And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And

the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD.

And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do : and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.

And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David* from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

COMMENT.—It would seem as if Samuel's affection for Saul was so strong that he could not bear to think of that "neighbour" better than he, whose success he had been forced to predict, for it needed almost a rebuke to rouse him to take the first step towards the appointment of the "man after God's own heart." He was to fill a horn with the sacred oil, and go to Bethlehem to anoint the chosen king from among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, and was descended in a direct line from Salmon and Rahab, the faithful woman of Jericho, from Nahasson, the prince of the tribe of Judah, and from Pharez, the son of Judah himself. Thus the sceptre was to be given to the lion tribe of Judah, the sceptre that should never depart till Shiloh should come.

* Beloved.

Samuel was unwilling. Perhaps he grieved for Jonathan, and feared to stir up strife; at any rate he objected that Saul would take vengeance quickly if he heard of a rival. He was answered that he should take a heifer with him, and hold one of his sacrificial feasts, as he had been wont to do in different places ever since he had re-awakened religion in Israel, and that Jesse and his sons would naturally come to the feast.

At first the elders of the little mountain village were afraid, lest the Judge should have come to rebuke them for some evil practised among them; but he assured them it was a friendly visit, and bade them sanctify themselves; namely, abstain from all forms of uncleanness, so as to hold the feast the next day. It was a peace-offering, the only kind for which female animals were used, and the chief portion was therefore eaten. To the banquet came Jesse, owner of those fair fields of Boaz, and with him seven goodly sons: the eldest, tall and stately, seemed to the prophet so kingly-looking, that he surely must be the chosen; but the Voice of the Lord bade him not look at the fine presence and lofty stature. God seeth not as man seeth, but looketh at the heart. And verily, the only time Eliab shows his character, he proves that in him Samuel would only have anointed another jealous and violent Saul. The same Voice forbade him to anoint any of the other seven as they passed by him in turn, and he at last in perplexity asked Jesse whether he had any more children. One more there was—the youngest—left behind by his proud brethren, and sent to watch the flock upon the hill-side, while they came to hold festival with the great Judge of Israel. He was sent for, and he came,—as unlike the first king whom Samuel had anointed as could well be. That was a mightyman, of giant mould, in the prime of life; this was a mere lad, small and slender of stature, fair in complexion, and auburn-haired (for that is the sense of the word *ruddy*), and with “beautiful eyes,”—eyes beautiful, no doubt, from the pure, high, loving soul within. So unlike was he, in his shepherd garb, to Samuel’s ideal, that another intimation was needed before he poured the holy oil; and in the midst of his seven brethren, the shepherd stripling, David, was anointed with the outward sign of the Holy Spirit, who thenceforth rested on him, and moulded him to his great and holy office.

Whether all knew the purport of the action is not clear; at any rate, David went back to his sheep, to wait in the duties of daily life till the time and the call should come.

LESSON LXIII.

DAVID SOOTHING SAUL.

B.C. 1065.—I SAM. xvi. 14—23.

But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee.

Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning * player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.

And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me.

Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.

Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep.

And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul.

And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer.

And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight.

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

COMMENT.—After Saul's rejection, and his resolute obduracy against repentance, the presence of the Holy Spirit, which in some measure had been with him since his anointing, departed from him. What was the degree in which that Holy Presence was with him we know not; but we do know that we too have an anointing of the Holy Ghost, and that when we harden ourselves against owning

* Skilful.

ourselves in the wrong, He will in like manner leave us. And when He hath left the soul empty, swept, and garnished, there is one who taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, to enter in and dwell there. So God, the just Judge, allowed an evil spirit to haunt the moody king, and terrify him into fits of madness. In this state, it seemed to his servants that music would be the best cure; and though no one was aware of the anointing at Bethlehem, it was already known that there dwelt a shepherd lad, beautiful in person, and a skilful player on the small light harp (the traditional shape of which was last preserved among the Jews in Mesopotamia). He was also known for his courage, for it seems that he had already slain the lion and the bear that attacked the flock; and if his brothers held him cheap, his neighbours better knew his worth. So the young David was sent to the rude court, under the pomegranate tree of Gibeah, where the King sat with his long spear by way of sceptre; loyal old Jesse sending gifts with his son, in thorough Oriental fashion. His sweet music and voice drove away the evil spirit, and Saul, to reward him, gave him a place among his armour-bearers, who seem to have been a sort of young attendants like the squires or pages of our own old times. Well might David's song drive away the evil spirit, for he was already the sweet psalmist whose verses above all still drive away the evil spirits of temptation, pride, and despondency, or whatever else assails the heart of man.

The LORD is my shepherd;
Therefore can I lack nothing.
He shall feed me in a green pasture:
And lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
He shall convert * my soul:
And bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.
Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me:
Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.
But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of
my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

It is believed that the 23rd Psalm, at least the beginning of it.

* Restore.

belonged to these pure and bright days of David's life, when his own care for his sheep made him look up to the Lord, his own Shepherd, who fed and guarded him even as he fed and guarded his flock amid the mountains and perilous ravines. He may have learnt to know the Lord as "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel," from Jacob's blessing (Gen. xlix.); and either now, or in moulding his boyhood's song to temple worship, his verse was filled with the promise of Him who should spring from his family, the Good Shepherd who leads us forth, gives us the Water of Life, feeds us at His table with the Bread of Heaven to strengthen us against our enemies, fills our cup, and with His Rod and Staff, the Cross on which He suffered for us, leads us through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and brings us at length to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

LESSON LXIV.

GOLIATH'S DEFIANCE.

B.C. 1063.—I SAM. xvii. 1—19.

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.

And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines.

And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them.

And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.*

And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail;† and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass.

And he had greaves‡ of brass upon his legs, and a target§ of brass between his shoulders.

And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam;|| and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him.

And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine,

* About ten feet altogether. † Scales of brass. ‡ Buskins guarded with brass.
§ Plate. || The great bar to which the web was hung.

and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul.

And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab the first-born, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.

But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Beth-lehem.

And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren;

And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare,* and take their pledge.†

Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

COMMENT.—At least two years had passed since the anointing of David and since his music had been required by Saul, and not being needed by the King, he had retired to his father's home at Bethlehem and to the homely care of the sheep upon the hills. He seems to have been as ready to take the hardest, humblest, most dangerous, and least honoured tasks as were his brothers to thrust him down to them. For when the Philistines came forth and the armies of Israel were summoned to meet them, the elder brothers went to the camp, hoping to gain honour and glory, but David was left behind to act as a shepherd on the mountains. The camps of Saul and of the Philistines were but eleven miles off, one of them on one hill and the other on the opposite one, and between them lay a valley named Elah, a word that means a "terebinth tree;" and travellers tell us that such trees still grow there. Saul marshalled his men in order of battle; but the Philistines, who had lost many battles to the Israelites, had now found a new plan by which they proposed

* See how they do.

† Bring home a token.

to settle which had a right to be lords of the land of Canaan. The notion seems as if it might have been learnt from some of their brethren in Cyprus or Greece. It was that, instead of the two armies fighting, there should be a single combat between two champions, one on each side, and that whoever won the victory should give it to his nation. And the Philistines thought there could be no doubt of the issue of the conflict, for their champion was a giant. He came from Gath, where the old Anakim had taken refuge from Caleb, and he belonged to a family of giants, so that he was probably of the old Canaanite stock. His height was nearly double that of ordinary men, and his armour greatly excelled any that the Israelites had seen, and filled them with astonishment and fear, both for its weight and workmanship—though, except the spear-head and the sword, it was all brass instead of iron. For forty days he marched up and down the valley, shouting defiance to Israel and calling on them to send forth a man who would dare to fight with him; but all in vain—no one durst attempt a battle that looked so unequal. Then it was that Jesse, anxious for the welfare of his elder sons, and desiring to send them provisions to sustain them during this long time that the army was detained in the camp, despatched his youngest to carry them a supply of food, take a present to their captain, and bring home tidings of their welfare.

LESSON LXV.

DAVID THE CHAMPION.

B.C. 1063.—I SAM. xvii. 20—39.

And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle.

For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army.

And David left his carriage * in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren.

And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the

* What he carried.

Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them.

And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid.

And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him.

And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness * of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?

And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner.

And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail.

And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed † to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him.

COMMENT.—Thus commissioned by his father, David could with a free heart go forth to the armies of Israel, where his high spirit and

* Foolishness.

† Tried.

warlike soul must have made him long to be, though as long as duty called him he had stayed at home with his sheep. Setting off in the early coolness of the morning, the light-footed shepherd boy reached the border of the camp just as the lines of Israelites were being called forth as if for battle. The word translated "trench" means rather the line of carts and waggons that were piled up, perhaps along a trench, to guard the tents within; and here he left his carriage—which means not what carried him, but what he carried, the loaves and the cheeses—in the care of the person appointed, and found his way to his brothers. As he was giving his message the Philistine champion stalked into the valley and shouted forth his defiance, while David heard from the men around that the King had offered great riches, and even the hand of his daughter, to any man who would undertake the battle. To David it seemed strange and shocking, nay, a reproach to Israel, that this man should "defy the armies of the living God" unanswered, unrebuked; and as he asked the question with kindling eyes and eager looks, his brother Eliab, with that petulant anger that arises from jealousy and a sense of unexpressed reproach, fell upon him with harsh words, scornfully rebuking him as if he had run away from his charge over the sheep out of pride and folly to gaze at the battle between the champions. David's answer was gentle, yet full of meaning: "What have I now done? is there not a cause?" Had he not both cause to leave home, and was there not cause for his anxiety—was not this the cause of God himself? All this time, David's manner and questions seem to have been not so much an offer of himself as a growing wonder and indignation that nobody should come forward to undertake to fight God's own fight, till at last Saul heard that there was a young lad who seemed to think it the simplest thing in the world to fight with the Philistine. So David was sent for to the King, and then it was that he saw there was no one else who would make this venture. "No one else will, so I must," has been the temper in which many of the greatest deeds have been done; and since that was the case, David stood before the King, and undertook the fight. The King replied by showing him how unequal the battle was; but David had no doubt. When he had been merely keeping his sheep, he had by God's help slain a lion and a bear; and when the Philistine had been defying God himself, there could be no doubt or danger in

going forth against him, since it must be God's battle. His simple earnestness overbore Saul himself, and he consented to the battle, arming David with his own armour; but the heavy brazen armour of the old King, so tall in stature, was too cumbrous for the light and slender youth, and he refused to wear it. It was some years since David had played on the harp to Saul: he had grown from a boy to a youth, and no one seems to have recognized him when he thus came fresh from his home to fight the Lord's battle. That battle is to be fought by every Christian. The Enemy is ever defying the armies of the living God—and yet the issue of the fight with him is as certain as it showed itself to David, if we will but fight in the same strength and earnestness. There is always the preparation—childish faults like the lion and the bear to be subdued with our first strength, to train it onwards for the great battle of life with the Great Enemy; and that battle must be fought with no common weapons. Neither strength, nor good sense, nor learning, nor desire to stand well with our neighbours, nor even love of virtue or fear of shame, will help us in the real stress of temptation. They are only Saul's brazen armour; Goliath himself uses them, and they will be sure to fail.

LESSON LXVI.

THE SLAYING OF GOLIATH.

(ABOUT) B.C. 1063.—I SAMUEL xvii. 40—54.

And David took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him.

And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and

with a spear, and with a shield : but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand ; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee ; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth ; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with the sword and spear : for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead ; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him ; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.

And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron.

And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.

And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem ; but he put his armour in his tent.

COMMENT.—David had refused Saul's heavy armour, and went forth with undefended head and breast, but with nothing to impede his natural lightness and agility, and with the weapons he best knew how to use. All the shepherds of the Eastern mountains carry slings, which are thongs of leather, wide enough in the middle for a stone to rest in ; and when both the ends are held in the hand, and the sling is whirled in the air, the stone flies out with much violence. These slings are useful in driving away wolves and jackals and wild dogs from the flocks ; and David's near neighbours, the Benjamites, were so skilful with them that they could sling with the left hand as well as with the right. With this weapon, and with five smooth pebbles from the bed of the watercourse of Elah, David went forth to the battle.

No wonder the Philistine thought himself mocked when he saw

the fair-faced, light-haired youth come forth against him from the armies of Israel, with the weapon he would have used against a dog. Words of defiance passed. Goliath declared he was going to give the flesh of the bold lad to be eaten by the birds and beasts of prey, and David solemnly replied in his turn that though Goliath came with spear, sword, and shield, he came in the name of the Lord of Hosts, to take up the challenge for Him, and that his own weakness would be another token to Israel that it is not by sword or shield that the Lord saveth. Then, as Goliath came thundering forwards, expecting to cleave him where he stood, the light-footed shepherd sprang to meet him, thereby giving the swing forward to his sling. The stone flew forth, and striking the proud forehead of the Philistine, sank into it, while his strength becoming instantly vain, he fell; and David, running up, stood over him and cut off his head with his own sword, David himself having none. Then came a terrible panic and confusion among the Philistines, and a pursuit by the Israelites by the way of Shaaraim, in the lowlands of Judah, even to their own towns of Gath and Ekron. The Israelites were delivered from their long terror, and the victory was more complete than any that had been won for centuries past. David kept the armour of his foe, and apparently offered it for a thank-offering at the Sanctuary; and the head, which he had cut off, he afterwards, when many years later he conquered Jerusalem, also placed there. In the Greek version of the Scriptures there is a short Psalm, said to have been David's thanksgiving at this time:—

I was small among my brethren,
And the youngest in my father's house;
I was feeding my father's sheep;
My hands made a harp,
And my fingers fitted a psaltery;
And who shall tell it to thy LORD?
He is the LORD; He heareth.
He sent His messenger, and took me from my father's flock,
And anointed me with the oil of anointing
My brethren were beautiful and tall,
But the LORD was not pleased with them.
I went out to meet the Philistine;
And he cursed me by his idols,
But I drew his sword, and beheaded him.
And took away his reproach from the children of Israel.

Most likely David rejected this Psalm as merely praise of his own exploit, and not fit for the worship of God ; but Israel's affection preserved it, and has handed it down. And in his victory we see beforehand Christ, the Anointed, the Son of David, bruising the head of the Great Enemy, the champion of the hosts of evil. There too we see, as before said, the battle that every Christian has to fight with the Enemy.

Not with sword and shield and lance,
But with charm-words from our Book,
Gems from our baptismal Brook,
Meet his stern advance.

He through every gate of sense,
Eye and ear, taste, touch, and smell,
Fain would hurl the shafts of hell.
Seek thou strong defence.

Guard in time those portals five
With the smooth stones from the fount,
With the Law from God's own Mount,
So thy war shall thrive.

LESSON LXVII.

SAUL'S JEALOUSY OF DAVID.

B.C. 1063.—I SAM. xvii. 55—58 ; xviii. 1—11.

And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth ? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell.

And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling * is.

And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man ? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

* Young lad.

And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely : and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets,* with joy, and with instruments of musick.

And the women answered one another as they played, and said,

Saul hath slain his thousands,

And David his ten thousands.

And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him ; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands : and what can he have more but the kingdom ?

And Saul eyed † David from that day and forward.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house : and David played with his hand, as at other times : and there was a javelin in Saul's hand.

And Saul cast the javelin ; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided ‡ out of his presence twice.

COMMENT.—Either David had altered so much in growing from boyhood to youth that he was not easy to recognize, or else, if Saul and Abner did know him as the harper, they did not know his family ; and this concerned Saul much, since the slayer of Goliath was to be the husband of his daughter. Observe, too, the rough asseveration of the irreligious Abner, so far beyond the “let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay,” which the third commandment enjoins, and showing, too, some dismay lest an unknown shepherd should marry the daughter of the first King of Israel, and all through one of Saul's hasty promises. But when David came back with the frightful head of the Philistine in his hand, and was led before the King, his answer, “I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite,” showed him to be of one of the noblest families of princely Judah—as indeed he was already, in a measure, the lion of the tribe.

And while his words were spoken, one of the most generous hearts that ever beat went forth and was fast bound to him. Probably Jonathan had been withheld from offering himself for the battle with the Philistine by his father's command, or else by

* Timbrels.

† Watched with dislike.

‡ Escaped.

knowing that Saul's jealousy would not brook to see him again hailed by Israel as their deliverer. Duty held him back ; but when he heard the brave young shepherd simply own that same trust which had led him to victory at Michmash, he loved him with all his heart. Jonathan must have been a much older man than David, but he treated him with the equal friendship of a young companion. He entered into a covenant—a mutual promise of love and brotherhood—with him ; and, after a frequent custom of the East, did him honour by presenting him with his own robes and weapons, even his girdle, his sword, and the bow, with which he specially excelled. Nor did that love ever swerve, although Jonathan was not long in perceiving that it was David who was to sit on the throne that might have seemed his own right. Such pure, unselfish love is one of the most beautiful examples we have. Indeed, during the campaign against the Philistines that followed, all was prosperity. David was received as one of the King's family, and was numbered among his valiant men ; he had a command in the army, and, young as he was, he behaved himself wisely. All went well till the host returned in triumph, and then the jealous temper of Saul was roused by the women who came out with timbrels and ringing triangles of brass, dancing and singing songs in honour of the conquerors :

Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands.

That was enough to set the King brooding in envy and vexation on the implied rivalry. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil." Saul's sullen anger *did* give place to the devil. It brought another access of his frenzy, inspired by the evil spirit ; and when David came in haste with the former remedy, his sweet music, he cast the spear—his sceptre—at him, hoping to nail him to the wall with it. David, taking this as part of his madness, persevered ; but the attempt was made a second time, and only the harper's alertness saved him. Self-will, obstinacy, jealousy, malice—these are the evils that grow from a small beginning, and by and by lead us utterly away from God and heaven.

LESSON LXVIII.

DAVID'S MARRIAGE.

B.C. 1062.—I SAM. xviii. 12—30.

And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul.

Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people.

And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him.

Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him.

But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.

And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the LORD's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.

And David said unto Saul, Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?

But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife.

And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.

And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.

And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king's son-in-law.

And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?

And the servants of Saul told him, saying, On this manner spake David.

And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry,* but the death of a hundred Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law: and the days were not expired.

Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men, that he might be the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.

* Marriage gift.

And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him.

And Saul was yet the more afraid of David ; and Saul became David's enemy continually.

Then the princes of the Philistines went forth : and it came to pass, after they went forth, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul ; so that his name was much set by.

COMMENT.—The sense that God's favour was gone from him and was with David haunted the mind of Saul, but he durst not openly quarrel with the deliverer of all Israel ; so, to remove him from his presence, he made him, instead of his chief armour-bearer, captain over a thousand men ; but this great promotion, coming even while he was so young, did not puff him up ; he behaved himself wisely, so that no offence could be found.

Now the slayer of Goliath had a right by Saul's own promise to marry his daughter, but the King's dislike to David made him unwilling to fulfil his engagement, and he laid on him the fresh condition that he should do further execution among the Philistines, hoping that thus he would meet his death ; and though David fully did his duty as a warrior, the elder daughter was bestowed elsewhere.

Her sister Michal, however, personally loved the brave, beautiful young warrior-minstrel, her brother's friend, and Saul saw that the feeling of his family and the people at large would not permit a second breach of his promise. Saul evidently had some secret flatterers, enemies of David—probably Doeg the Edomite, and Cush the Benjamite, who is named in headings to the Psalms—and them he sent to whisper secretly to David that his poverty would be no objection to the marriage, provided he would slay a hundred Philistines. Two hundred were accordingly killed by the undaunted champion, who thus won his wife by brave deeds of arms, and forced from the King the reward of his victories. In vain the Philistine princes went forth to battle to avenge the slaughter David had committed ; still the Lord was with him : he behaved himself wisely, and always was the victor ; and if Saul hated him, he had the love of the people, the warm friendship of Jonathan, and the fervent love of Michal. Nor had he yet found out that Michal's was only love for his outward gifts of beauty and of bravery, not for those deeper and nobler gifts

that truly raised him above other men. Had Michal, to whom David's early love had been given, been more like her brother Jonathan than her father Saul, David's history and that of all his line might have been very different. The woman whom a great man loves has much to answer for.

LESSON LXIX.

DAVID'S FLIGHT.

B.C. 1062.—I SAM. xix. 1—17.

And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.

But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David : and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee : now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself :

And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee ; and what I see, that I will tell thee.

And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David ; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good :

For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel : thou sawest it, and didst rejoice : wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause ?

And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan : and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.

And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

And there was war again : and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter ; and they fled from him.

And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand : and David played with his hand.

And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin ; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall : and David fled, and escaped that night.

Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning : and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to-night, to-morrow thou shalt be slain.

So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped.

And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth.

And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick.

And Saul sent the messengers again to David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him.

And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster.

And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?

COMMENT.—The frantic jealousy of Saul increased on him, and he spoke to Jonathan, as well as to his evil counsellors, of having David slain. He was, however, still so far accessible to reason, that when Jonathan calmly argued that David was not only innocent but had put his life in his hand—namely, had run into great danger that he might kill the Philistine—Saul listened, and took an oath that he should not be slain, and Jonathan brought him back once more to his post of honour about the King's person. But every success of David against the Philistines filled Saul with greater jealousy of him who had slain his ten thousands; and so when David returned from his next campaign the evil spirit again seized on Saul, and once more while David was singing he threw his javelin sceptre so fiercely that it stood quivering in the wall, while David slipped out of his presence.

And even when the frenzy fit had passed, Saul's deadly purpose remained, and he sent messengers to slay David at the house where he had retired, thinking, as before, that the javelin had only been aimed at him while the King was in his frantic state. They were to watch before the door, and kill him as he came out; but their purpose was made vain by the affection of his wife, Michal, who let him down by a cord through a window, and then, to give him time to make his escape, placed an image on his couch, laid a plaited coverlet of goat's hair beneath, to look like a man's hair, and threw his cloak over it, so that he might be supposed to be lying sick there. Her father sent to seize him in his bed, and then it was that her artifice was discovered, and she excused herself by pretending that he had forced her to aid his escape by threatening her life. The word used for image is "teraphim," and thus it seems that Michal had secretly

kept up some superstitious worship of these idols, as Rachel had done, and as it would seem only too many of the Israelite women did. After this parting, when she had saved him, she seems to have been taken back to her father's house, and to have seen the husband of her youth no more; and the heart that had not been whole towards God was not faithful enough to her husband to hold out against her father's rage.

LESSON LXX.

THE SCHOOL OF PROPHETS.

B.C. 1060.—I SAM. xix. 18—24; xx. 1—10.

So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth.*

And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah.

And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying,† and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.

Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu: and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they be at Naioth in Ramah.

And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah.

And he stripped off his clothes‡ also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked§ all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?

And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?

And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so.

And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.

* The dwellings or cottages.

† Royal robe.

‡ Singing hymns.

§ Without his upper garment.

Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.

And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat : but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even.

If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city : for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.

If he say thus, It is well ; thy servant shall have peace : but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him.

Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant ; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee : notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself ; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father ?

And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee : for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee ?

Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me ? or what if thy father answer thee roughly ?

COMMENT.—When David escaped out of his own house at Gibeah, by the contrivance of his wife, he fled to the aged prophet who had anointed him, and found a fit and suitable dwelling among the young men whom Samuel was training in the schools or colleges of the prophets—namely, the sacred preachers and minstrels at Ramah. Here David laid aside the soldier and became the psalmist. One at least of the Psalms, called sometimes the fugitive psalms, seems to have been his entreaty at this period, namely, the 7th, the title of which declares that it was called forth by the words of Cush the Benjamite. It begins—

O LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust :
Save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me :
Lest he tear my soul like a lion,
Rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.
O LORD my God, if I have done this ;
If there be iniquity in my hands ;
If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me ;
(Yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy :)
Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it ;
Yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth,
And lay mine honour in the dust.

But Saul viewed David as a rival raised up against him by Samuel, and was especially angered to hear of him as in the *Naiioth*, or dwellings of the prophets, so he sent messengers to seize him there ; but when they beheld the beautiful scene of all the youths

standing chanting their glorious hymns together, and the venerable Samuel, with his long white hair and linen ephod, leading them, their spirits were overcome by the Divine Spirit, and they too joined in the hymns of praise. Even Saul, when he came in person in pursuit of David, felt the force and overpowering influence of that holy place of song; and, as when his own anointing was fresh upon him, he too made himself one of them. He threw off his royal robes, and lay down in the simple garment beneath, and again the saying went round, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Meantime David left Ramah, and, coming back to Gibeah, held counsel with Jonathan. Perhaps he wanted to understand whether the pursuit was the mere passing effect of madness, or whether he had really given such serious offence that he must flee, and live as an outlaw, instead of retaining his place at Court. Jonathan declared that his father could not, in his right senses, entertain any design of killing David without telling him; but David thought that Saul might be keeping it from him because of their friendship, and the two began to arrange a scheme for finding out whether Saul meant to persecute David in his moments of sanity as well as in his frenzy. On the day of the new moon, the priests were wont to blow their silver trumpets (Numb. x.), and a feast with peace-offerings was held by each family unto the Lord. Now David, as the King's son-in-law, and as a great officer at Court, had his place at Saul's festal table, but he durst not occupy it; and when he should be missed, Jonathan was to account for his absence by saying he was gone to a feast of the family of Jesse at Bethlehem. If Saul accepted the answer, he might be supposed to have no ill intentions; but if he showed himself offended or suspicious, it would be plain that David could not safely re-assume his place in the Court, and he conjured Jonathan, by the solemn oath of friendship between them, to tell him truly how matters stood. Jonathan promised, and then David suggested, "What if thy father answer thee roughly?" that is, if he be so violent as to forbid our meeting again; a question Jonathan would not answer in the house, where he might be overheard by Doeg or Cush, or the other secret enemies of David, who were whispering against him as false witnesses afterwards whispered against the Son of David.

LESSON LXXI.

SAUL'S NEW-MOON FEAST.

B.C. 1060.—I SAM. xx. 11—34.

And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field.

And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to-morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee ;

The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan : but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace : and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.

And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not :

But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever : no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies.

And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him : for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

Then Jonathan said to David, To-morrow is the new moon : and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty.

And when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel.*

And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark.

And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them ; then come thou : for there is peace to thee, and no hurt ; as the LORD liveth.

But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee ; go thy way : for the LORD hath sent thee away.

And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD be between thee and me for ever.

So David hid himself in the field : and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat.

And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall : and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty.

* Which sheweth the way.

Nevertheless Saul spake not anything that day : for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he is not clean ; surely he is not clean.

And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David's place was empty : and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday nor to-day?

And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem :

And he said, Let me go, I pray thee ; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city ; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there : and now, if I have found favour in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table.

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion ?

For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die.

And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain ? what hath he done ?

And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him : whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.

So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month : for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.

COMMENT.—Out in the open field, secure from listeners, the two faithful friends arranged their plan. Jonathan began (in a sentence the exact translation of which is difficult, though the general drift is plain enough) by taking a solemn oath that he would keep David informed of all designs against him, if David would, on the other hand, show mercy and kindness to himself and his children in the day of that triumph over his father's house which he so plainly foresaw and so meekly accepted. The covenant was made with the earnestness of the two true hearts that loved one another as their own soul, rivals though they were in a manner forced to be.

The plan, then, was that David should go for three days to the feast of the house of Jesse at Bethlehem, and then return and hide himself by a stone that served as a landmark in a hollow that he had used as an ambush before—perhaps when attacking the Philistines ; while Jonathan, who might be watched and followed, should make his favourite practice of archery an excuse for coming out to the spot, and should contrive by the directions he gave his attendant to convey to David whether the King were favourably disposed or otherwise.

So we may conclude David went to Bethlehem, and returned in due time to his hiding-place. Meanwhile, Saul feasted with his Court about him, his chief captain Abner by his side, and his sons and chieftains arranged in their due order. When he at first missed David, the King supposed him to be absent because of some chance accident which might have rendered him legally unclean for a day or two ; but when, on the second day, his place was again empty, Saul's passion began to rise, and when Jonathan made the answer that had been agreed upon, it was treated as an insult. That Jonathan should permit the King's son-in-law to prefer the festival of his own family to the royal one, put Saul in a fury, in which, in the true Eastern fashion of violence, he included Jonathan's mother as well as himself in the abuse, declared that the family would never be safe so long as the son of Jesse lived, and at last, on the calm and respectful reply of his son, launched a javelin at him, as before at David. So grew the frenzy to which he had delivered himself over. And all this did the true-hearted Jonathan endure ; always as good a son as he was a faithful friend.

LESSON LXXII.

THE SHEWBREAD.

B.C. 1060.—I SAM. xx. 35—xxi. 9.

And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him.

And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.

And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, Is not the arrow beyond thee ?

And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master.

But the lad knew not anything: only Jonathan and David knew the matter.

And Jonathan gave his artillery* unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city.

And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the

* Weapons.

south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times : and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.

And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed : and Jonathan went into the city.

Then came David to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest : and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee ?

And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee ; and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.

Now therefore what is under thine hand ? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present.

And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread.

So the priest gave him hallowed bread : for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD ; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul.

And David said unto Ahimelech, And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword ? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.

And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod : if thou wilt take that, take it : for there is no other save that here. And David said, There is none like that : give it me.

COMMENT.—In the morning of the third day, according to the concerted plan, Jonathan went out as if to practise with his bow ; the token of the King's enmity was given, and then Jonathan, being more free from spies than he had perhaps expected, was able to send away the lad who alone was with him, and give himself one more meeting with the friend he loved so well. Never was parting more touching than this—David, the anointed, weeping too bitterly to utter a word over the broken ties and bitter separation ; and Jonathan, the dethroned heir, striving to comfort him and bid him go in peace, but with a voice broken with sobs, so that he could not finish his sentence. So they parted, only to meet again for one stolen interview. And where was David to go—outcast and wanderer as he had become ? He durst not go to Bethlehem ; it was the first place whither Saul would have sent for him. But he and

apparently a few followers attached to his person made their way to the priestly city of Nob, not far from Jerusalem, and there he presented himself alone to the high priest Ahimelech. It must be owned that David did here tell a falsehood in pretending a special commission from the King. He was not a perfect man, and it is for his deep devotion and heart-whole love of God that he stands so high, not for absence of all blame. And verily this deception had terrible consequences.

David's need was of provisions and weapons, but the priest could give him none but the shewbread—the twelve loaves, or rather cakes, that stood in two rows upon a golden table as an offering to the Lord, and were changed every Sabbath day. It was unlawful for any save the priests to eat this bread, but in the present case of necessity it was given to David. In after-times this action was quoted by our blessed Lord when rebuking the Pharisees for their rigid and uncharitable strictness (Matt. xii. 3, 4) :—

Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him ;*

How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

Here in the first place our Lord shows that there are times when charity overleaps the regular law of ceremony. Then, looking far beyond, He explains how David the anointed, dispensing the shewbread to his followers, typified Himself, the Anointed King as well as Priest, dispensing the Bread of Life.

David likewise obtained from the priest the sword of Goliath, which he had now full strength to wield, and which far exceeded all the weapons made in Israel. But that visit of his to Nob had been marked by one of his bitterest enemies, namely, Doeg the Edomite, who seems to have been sent by Saul on some official message to the priests, and who spitefully marked the favour with which they treated David, who was regarded at Gibeah as a rival set up by Samuel in opposition to Saul, because the King would not brook the old prophet's assumption of authority.

* In St. Mark's Gospel the name is Abiathar. He was the son of Ahimelech, heir to the High Priesthood, and a friend of David. Therefore it is probable that he persuaded his father to give the shewbread.

LESSON LXXIII.

THE CAVE OF ADULLAM.

B.C. 1060.—I SAM. xxi. 10—15 ; xxii. 1—5 ; 2 SAM. xxiii. 13—17.

And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrambled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard.

Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad : wherefore then have ye brought him to me?

Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?

David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam : and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him.

And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him ; and he became a captain over them : and there were with him about four hundred men.

And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab : and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me.

And he brought them before the king of Moab : and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold.

And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold ; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth.

And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam : and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim.

And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Beth-lehem.

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!

And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that was by the gate, &

brought it to David : nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD.

And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this : is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it.

COMMENT.—From Nob, David fled to Gath, where a prince named Achish, and apparently also called Abi-Melech—"the son of the king," from the ancient kings of Gera—was reigning, but he was recognized as the slayer of Goliath, the hero of the Israelite songs and the rival feared by Saul, and he could only secure himself by feigning insanity, when the awe and respect with which Eastern nations always treat madmen would be sure to preserve him from danger.

Thence he made his way to a very different retreat, one of the hollows in the rocky hills between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea with which he must have been familiar during his shepherd life. Those mountains are full of large caves capable of holding a little army, and with a fortification or hold, either in advance of the cave or above it, David was well guarded; and here, moreover, he was joined by all his own family, and by all who were distressed by Saul's violence and exactions, so that he found himself at the head of a band of 400 men, among whom were his nephews, Joab and Abishai, sons of his sister Zeruah, apparently men about the same age as himself, brave, fierce, and swift-footed, and a number of other valiant men who had become greatly attached to the brave young captain. Long after was an exploit recorded that showed their ardent love for him. Those barren hills are fearfully arid. The winter cold and summer heat alike beat on them unrelieved, and the hardships were evidently too great for the aged Jesse and his wife, since David conducted them to Mizpeh, the watch-tower of Moab, whence Jesse's grandmother Ruth had come, and there obtained shelter for them. Bethlehem itself, now through Saul's jealousy deprived of the brave family that had once protected it, was garrisoned by the Philistines; and David, from his stronghold on the thirsty mountains, gazed down on the sloping pastures and green fields he knew and loved so well, and, fainting and fevered, broke out with a longing cry for the water of the clear well of Bethlehem, "the waters of comfort." Three of his bravest warriors heard it, and in their

vehement love dared all dangers, broke through the enemy, drew water from the spring that still flows beside the gate, and safely brought it back to their leader on the mountain. But overcome at the thought of the hazard they had run, David deemed the water sacred, and could not drink. Thus purchased, it was the blood of men, and could only be an offering to the Lord. It was made sacred by the love and devotion that had procured it—even as in later times Alexander the Great felt when, in like manner, water had been brought him at the like fearful risk.

LESSON LXXIV.*

DAVID'S SONG OF TRUST.

B.C. 1060.—PSALM xxxiv.

I will always give thanks unto the LORD :
His praise shall ever be in my mouth.
My soul shall make her boast in the LORD :
The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.
O praise the LORD with me,
And let us magnify his name together.
I sought the LORD, and he heard me :
Yea, he delivered me out of all my fear.
They had an eye unto him, and were lightened :
And their faces were not ashamed.
Lo, the poor crieth, and the LORD heareth him :
Yea, and saveth him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD tarrieth round about them that fear him,
And delivereth them.

O taste, and see, how gracious the LORD is :
Blessed is the man that trusteth in him.
O fear the LORD, ye that are his saints :
For they that fear him lack† nothing.
The lions do lack, and suffer hunger :
But they who seek the LORD shall want no manner of thing that is
good.
Come, ye children, and hearken unto me :
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
What man is he that lusteth‡ to live : and would fain§ see good
days?

* Not for the little ones.

† Want.

‡ Wisheth.

§ Gladly.

Keep thy tongue from evil :
 And thy lips, that they speak no guile.*
 Eschew† evil, and do good :
 Seek peace, and ensue‡ it.

The eyes of the LORD are over the righteous,
 And his ears are open unto their prayers.
 The countenance of the LORD is against them that do evil :
 To root out the remembrance of them from the earth.
 The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth them,
 And delivereth them out of all their troubles.
 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a contrite§ heart ;
 And will save such as be of an humble spirit.
 Great are the troubles of the righteous :
 But the LORD delivereth him out of all.
 He keepeth all his bones,
 So that not one of them is broken.
 But misfortune shall slay the ungodly :
 And they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

The LORD delivereth the souls of his servants :
 And all they that put their trust in him shall not be destitute.||

COMMENT.—This Psalm was composed by David at the time of his feigned madness and flight from Gath ; and it is precious to us, not only as showing what he felt and thought as an exile and wanderer, and giving his inner self as well as his outer character, but it is full of prophecy, and helps us to see how he was a type of our Lord and His body, the Church.

It is to be observed that it is one of the Psalms which have each verse beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in their order (only omitting *Vau* or *V*), and adding *Pe* at the end. It is in three divisions of seven verses each, and the most marked verses are the middle ones in each division.

We can see that the Psalm shows how David's hope and trust began to rise again after his grievous misfortunes, and how he called the friends who began to gather round him, to observe that great as had been his dangers, God had delivered him out of all. The "poor man," as he calls himself (foretelling in type Him who became poor for us), prayed and was saved. Well he knew that God's angels encamp around those who fear Him, as surely as

* Deceit. † Avoid.
 § Bruised with repentance.

‡ Follow.
 || In want.

when Jacob beheld their hosts at Mahanaim (the word David uses), or as Elisha showed them long after to his servant. Then he calls those followers who loved him, but did not yet love God, to *taste*, try by experience the wonderful goodness of his God.

In arid, thirsty Adullam, the outlaws need have no fear of hunger, even though they never robbed nor used violence. Lions might suffer hunger, but they who seek the Lord shall never want any manner of thing that is good. He calls his brave men round as children to hearken while he sings to them the safe simple secret of happiness, four lines that may well be the rule of life—echoing on from David's harp at his cavern door to St. Peter's Epistle (1 Pet. iii. 10—12):—

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile :

Let him eschew evil, and do good ; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

For the eyes of the LORD are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers : but the face of the LORD is against them that do evil.

There is something of penitence in these lines—perhaps David's own confession of the guile he had used towards the High Priest, which had led to fearful consequences ; and, indeed, there is a strain of repentance in the later verse, where he speaks of God's mercy to the contrite heart and humble spirit. Continual penitence that hates his own sins, for their unlikeness to God, is the great characteristic of David, and keeps up his loving trust that in every trouble he will be delivered—hurt and bruised ; but his bones, his strength, never broken. In those words he further prophesies how when the Anointed hung on the Cross, as the Paschal Lamb, a bone of Him was not broken ; and both in these types alike show how it always is with the Body of Christ, the Church. As long as she puts her trust in God and lives in love and penitence, her troubles may be great, but her bone, her strength, shall not be broken. So again with each single Christian. Let him follow David's rule, repeated by St. Peter : let him *taste* for himself the goodness of the Lord, and angels will encamp about him, and God shall deliver his soul, and never leave him destitute.

LESSON LXXV.

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE PRIESTS.

B.C. 1060.—1 SAM. xxii. 6—23.

When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him ;)

Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites ; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds ;

That all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day ?

Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub.

And he enquired of the LORD for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.

Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob : and they came all of them to the king.

And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my lord.

And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day ?

Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house ?

Did I then begin to enquire of God for him ? be it far from me : let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father : for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more.

And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house.

And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD ; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD.

And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David.

And Abiathar shewed David that Saul had slain the LORD's priests.

And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul : I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house.

Abide thou with me, fear not : for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life : but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.

COMMENT.—Saul held his state under his great terebinth tree at Gibeah, towering above all the people, with the spear that served him for a sceptre in his hand. He was grim, fierce, and furious at finding that David, whose very name he would not speak, was gathering men about him, and that it was by Jonathan's warning that he had escaped. Bitterly and sadly spoke the old King, as one complaining that he had no real friends about him, and never perceiving that this was his own doing. Then, to inflame his wrath, up spake the malicious Edomite herdsman, Doeg. He declared that Ahimelech had inquired of the Lord for David—a thing only done for the Chief of the State, and therefore treason—describing his gifts, and concealing how he had himself been deceived. Now Saul especially regarded David as a rival set up against him by Samuel and the priesthood, and his rage was great. He sent for Ahimelech and reproached him fiercely ; and when he answered with a brave defence of David's faithfulness and an entire denial of the charge of having inquired of the Urim for him, Saul's frantic passion broke forth, and he sentenced all the priests to instant death. None of the Israelites would perform the hideous command, but the spiteful Edomite and the herdsmen under him were ready enough to execute the massacre, and not only killed eighty-five priests, but sacked the whole priestly city of Nob, slaying the wives and children of the priests, and likewise the Gibeonite servants, who dwelt there under the protection of Joshua's oath of old. Thus had the miserable Saul made a further desert for himself, and cut off the last link that had bound him to holy things !

Ahimelech was the son of Ahitub, son to the wicked Phinehas, and this cruel slaughter was a fulfilment of the warning made to

Eli nearly a century before, that "all the increase of his house should die in the flower of their age." So it is that man's guilt is overruled to bring about God's judgments and purposes. Only one of the priests of Nob escaped the slaughter, namely, the young Abiathar, who fled to David with his dreadful tale, and remained with him as the companion of his wanderings, bringing with him the Ephod with the Urim and Thummim, all of sanctity that was left to the unhappy people of Israel. David took blame to himself as the occasion of this horrible deed, and his grief and indignation against the slanderer Doeg were poured forth in several Psalms, in which he foretells the utter destruction of the false witness, and therewith carries on a prophecy of those who should witness falsely against a greater High Priest than Ahimelech.

Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man ?
The goodness of God endureth continually.
Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs ;
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
Thou lovest evil more than good ;
And lying rather than to speak righteousness.
Thou lovest all devouring words,
O thou deceitful tongue.
God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away,
And pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place,
And root thee out of the land of the living.
The righteous also shall see, and fear,
And shall laugh at him :
Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength ;
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,
And strengthened himself in his wickedness.
But I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God :
I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.
I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it :
And I will wait on thy name ; for it is good before thy saints.

PSALM lii.

LESSON LXXVI.

THE DELIVERANCE OF KEILAH.

B.C. 1061.—I SAM. xxiii. 1—13.

Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshing-floors.

Therefore David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.

And David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah : how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?

Then David enquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him, and said, Arise, go down to Keilah ; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand.

And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand ; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars.

And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.

And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him ; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.

Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake.

Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down.

Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up.

Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah : and he forbore to go forth.

COMMENT.— David was induced to leave his retreat in the cave of Adullam by the prophet Gad, who had probably been bred up in one of Samuel's colleges of prophets. He brought him commands from

God to come down from his rocky fastness into the lower lands of Judah. The command must have tried his faith, but he did not hesitate to obey, and took shelter in the forest of Hareth, a place not now to be found, as no woods remain in Judea. The benefit of his obedience soon appears, for he learnt what would hardly have come to his ears in the rocks to the eastward, that the Philistines, profiting by Saul's madness and the people's disunion, were besieging Keilah, a fortified city in the lowlands of Judah on their border, and devastating the country round, especially the threshing-floors where the corn was collected after harvest.

The spirit of the warrior who had "slain his ten thousands" awoke within David. He inquired of the Lord, probably through Gad, and received his bidding to go and smite the Philistines and save Keilah. His men would have hung back, doubting their own strength, but the answer of the Lord was repeated, and the sudden attack of the 400 outlaws routed and dismayed the Philistines, and rescued Keilah. It seems to have been here that Abiathar the priest came to him with the Urim and Thummim, and he had recourse to this sacred mode of inquiry, when Saul, hearing of his deliverance of Keilah, thought himself secure of severing him when shut into the city. David made inquiries whether the people of Keilah whom he had saved could be trusted not to surrender him to the King, and received for answer that they would certainly deliver him up. He therefore was obliged to leave the place and continue his wanderings. From this time began that wonderful life of his, haunting the hills and forests, defending the Israelites from all their enemies, whether Philistine or Amalekite robbers, and though continually hunted by the King, never lifting a hand against him, but honouring him as the Lord's anointed, and even loving him for what he once had been, through all. Many exceedingly brave men joined him, among them another of the priestly family, whose exploits are thus described :—

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lion-like men of Moab; he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow :

And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man : and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand ; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear.

Moreover, a brave company of Gadites swam the Jordan to join David; and likewise a band of the men of Judah, under his nephew Amasai, and even some Benjamites.

And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains.

* * * * *

These were of the sons of Gad, captains of the host : one of the least was over an hundred, and the greatest over a thousand.

These are they that went over Jordan in the first month, when it had overflowed all his banks ; and they put to flight all them of the valleys, both toward the east, and toward the west.

And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David.

And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you : but if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it.

Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse : peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers ; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band.

LESSON LXXVII.

THE TREACHERY OF THE ZIPHITES.

B.C. 1059.—1 SAM. xxiii. 14—28.

And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.

And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life : and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood.

And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

And he said unto him, Fear not : for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee ; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee ; and that also Saul my father knoweth.

And they two made a covenant before the LORD : and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David

hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?*

Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand.

And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the LORD; for ye have compassion on me.

Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there; for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly.

See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah.

And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon.

Saul also and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down into a rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon.

And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed† David and his men round about to take them.

But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.

Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Sela-hammalekoth.‡

COMMENT.—After leaving Keilah, David found a shelter in a wild tract, still called Tell Ziph, not far from Hebron; and here, while Saul was seeking him everywhere, Jonathan contrived one more loving meeting with him, comforting him for the being put above him with the assurance, "I shall be next unto thee." But the men of Ziph gave Saul information where David was, and he came with a great army, and had surrounded the whole district where David was lurking, when the tidings came that there was a Philistine invasion, and he was obliged to hurry away to make head against the enemy. Again the deliverance was providential, and David gave thanks for it in the 54th Psalm, which shows how keenly his loving spirit felt unkindness and treachery, and how strong his trust was.

Save me, O God, by thy name,
And judge me by thy strength.
Hear my prayer, O God;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.

* The Wilderness.

† Surrounded.

‡ The rock of escapings.

For strangers are risen up against me,
And oppressors seek after my soul :
They have not set God before them.
Behold, God is mine helper :
The LORD is with them that uphold my soul.
He shall reward evil unto mine enemies :
Cut them off in thy truth.
I will freely sacrifice unto thee :
I will praise thy name, O LORD ; for it is good.
For he hath delivered me out of all trouble :
And mine eye hath looked upon mine enemies.

David speaks of the Ziphites as treating him as a stranger, and thus foretells how the Romans should join with Herod and the Chief Priests in besetting the true Messiah, and cutting Him off from the face of the earth.

And to us he has left a verse of precious praise : " I will praise thy name, because it is so comfortable "—as it stands in the Prayer-book. Like David, through all troubles and adversities, may the praise of our God ever be our comfort. Our translation has put in the word *desire* into the last verse ; but good critics tell us that this is a mistake, and that the meaning is, that, while comforted by the Lord, the Psalmist can look on his enemies without fear or dismay.

LESSON LXXVIII.

THE CAVE OF ENGADDI.

B.C. 1059.—I SAMUEL xxiii. 29 ; xxiv.

And David went up, and dwelt in strong holds at En-gedi.

And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.

And he came to the sheepcotes* by the way, where was a cave ; and Saul went in : and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.

And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the

* Folds built up with stones.

LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.*

And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.

So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.

David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.

And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?

Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed.

Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it.

The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

As saith the proverb of the ancients,† Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea.

The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.

And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept.

And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.

And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not.

For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day.

And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand.

Swear now therefore unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house.

And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold.

* Secretly.

† The saying of old time.

COMMENT.—The next retreat chosen by David was a beautiful ravine in the hills of Judah, opening over the Dead Sea, about the middle of the western side. It slopes very gently down, in soft green pasture, from the foot of the steep cliffs which enclose it and which are particularly lofty and steep to the north. A clear spring of water leaps down from the cliff, and it is therefore called Engaddi, "the fountain of the wild goat." The rocks are limestone, and contain huge caverns, for shelter or concealment; so that it seemed as if a better home for the persecuted could not be found than among the shepherds who folded their flocks within the mouth of the caverns and fed them on the rich grass.

Thither, however, Saul soon pursued him with three thousand picked men; but when David with his band retreated into the dark recesses of the winding cave, they were completely invisible, although they, looking outwards to the light, could perfectly well observe their enemies.

Here, then, they saw Saul enter the cave, through the sheepfolds, while they themselves lay unseen, and they urged their leader to take advantage of the opportunity and seize or slay him. David stole gently towards him in the dark, but he could not strike a treacherous blow, above all against the anointed of the Lord. He only cut off the train of the long royal robe, as an evidence that Saul's life had been in his power; and even for this his conscience smote him; and he not only kept back his followers from making any attack upon the King, but he followed him out of the cave, and called on him, showing him both in word and gesture even more than his wonted honour and respect, pleading with him that it was now proved that the accusation of treason was unfounded. "Yet," he says, "thou huntest my soul to take it." The Lord would judge; but, let Saul do his worst, David would never lift a hand against his consecrated person. There was an old saying—"Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked"—which he repeated, meaning that if Saul went on in his present violent course evil would befall him, but it should come from a wicked person, not from David! And was it worth while, then, to come with an army against any one so insignificant—"a dead dog"—one single flea, as he even termed himself?

Saul was touched and overpowered by the perception of his

recent peril, of David's forbearance, and of his present meek humility. He burst into tears, and owned himself to blame and David faithful; and he even confessed his assurance that David must sit on his throne, and only entreated for mercy to his children—a promise that David readily gave and confirmed with an oath. So did David not only show perfect loyalty and nobleness, but, instead of being "overcome of evil, overcame evil with good." The 57th Psalm is his joyous thanksgiving for his deliverance. There he recounts how his enemy came to take him, and fell himself into the pit he had prepared, and in a full flood of joyous praise he sings—

Awake up, my glory;
Awake, psaltery and harp:
I myself will awake early.
I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people:
I will sing unto thee among the nations.
For thy mercy is great unto the heavens,
And thy truth unto the clouds.
Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens:
Let thy glory be above all the earth.

To us this is an Easter Sunday psalm, for it is fully true only of the Son of David, who came forth from His rocky sepulchre to, pardon and to reign.

LESSON LXXIX.

THE CHURLISHNESS OF NABAL.

B.C. 1059.—1 SAM. xxv. 1—19.

And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; * and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful

* The Park.

countenance : but the man was churlish and evil in his doings ; and he was of the house of Caleb.

And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep.

And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name :

And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast.

And now I have heard that thou hast shearers : now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel.

Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes : for we come in a good day : give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David.*

And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased.

And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David ? and who is the son of Jesse ? there be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master.

Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be ?

So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings.

And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword ; and David also girded on his sword : and there went up after David about four hundred men ; and two hundred abode by the stuff.*

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master ; and he railed on them.

But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant† with them, when we were in the fields :

~~They were~~ a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them ~~keeping~~ the sheep.

Now therefore ~~know~~ and consider what thou wilt do ; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household : for he is such a son of Belial‡ that a man cannot speak to him.

Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles § of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses.

And she said unto her servants, Go on before me ; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal.

COMMENT.—The holy prophet, Levite, and Nazarite, who had raised Israel up from her worst depths of degradation and distress,

* Remained to protect the baggage.

‡ Man of nothing.

† Had to do with them.

§ Skins.

died, and was mourned by all Israel. He had not seen his work of reformation fully done. It had been shattered and broken off by Saul's self-will, then by his frenzy and persecution of David ; but it had been only deferred, not ruined. Neither of the two kings whom Samuel had anointed came to his burial, as it appears. Saul had altogether broken off with all Divine control when he slew the priests, and David could not safely venture into the neighbourhood of Gibeah.

David had gone further south, even into the wilderness of Paran, where the later wanderings of Israel had been, and bordering upon another tract, called Maon, belonging to Judah. In Maon, about six miles from Hebron, lay a place called Carmel,—*not* the famous Mount Carmel that is on the coast of the Mediterranean, much further north, but, like it, called by a name meaning "the park," or "the well-wooded ;" and here dwelt a man named Nabal, of great wealth in cattle. He is called a Calebite, a descendant of the great old champion Caleb, whose possessions had lain near Hebron ; but Caleb also meant "a dog," and some have thought that it means that Nabal was dog-like, of a currish, snarling nature. It appears that when the flocks and herds were sent out to pasture far from home, in places exposed to the robberies of the Amalekites and other robber tribes, David and his men became their protectors, and expected in return to receive contributions for their support, which were fairly earned by their guardianship. Sheep-shearing is one of the favourite festivals of an Eastern farm—when all the flocks are gathered in from all quarters, with the whole tribes of servants who keep them, and there is universal plenty and enjoyment ; and David sent a most courteously expressed message, with the true Oriental humility of expression, entreating Nabal to send a gift in acknowledgment of the services of his followers.

But Nabal's answer was churlish and rude even to brutality, and so irritating, that his servants, who well knew under what obligations they lay to David, and had seen how brave and well-ordered his men were, came in alarm to Abigail, Nabal's wise and beautiful wife, and told her that their master had shown such ingratitude to David, and insulted him so grossly, that revenge would certainly be taken unless she could prevent it. They bore high testimony to

the discipline of that band of hungry outlaws, for nothing had been missed all the time they were at hand, but they had rather been a wall of protection day and night. Yet Nabal was such a man of Belial, so foolish, obstinate, and worthless, that they durst not explain matters to him ! In the time of our feasting and rejoicing, does the Greater than David never knock at our door, by the hands of His poor and needy, and do we never return a churlish denial ?

LESSON LXXX.

ABIGAIL'S INTERCESSION.

B.C. 1059.—1 SAM. XXV. 20—44.

And it was so, as she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert* of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her ; and she met them.

Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him : and he hath requited me evil for good.

So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any man of his house.

And when Abigail saw David, she hastened and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground,

And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be : and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, † and hear the words of thine handmaid.

Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal : for as his name is, so is he ; Nabal ‡ is his name, and folly is with him : but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.

Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal.

And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord.

I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid : for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house ; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.

Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul : but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God : and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling.

* Sheltered side.

† Hearing.

‡ Fool, a weak silly man.

And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel ;

That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself : but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid.

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me :

And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.

For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any man of his house.

So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house ; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.

And Abigail came to Nabal ; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king ; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken : wherefore she told him nothing less or more, until the morning light.

But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal that he died.

And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil : for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head. And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife.

And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee to take thee to him to wife.

And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.

And Abigail hasted, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that went after her ; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife.

David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel ; and they were also both of them his wives.

But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim.

COMMENT.—When our Lord, the true David, sends His poor to ask our alms, and they are denied, His wrath is kindled. He says : “I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat ; thirsty, and ye gave me

no drink ; naked, and ye clothed me not ; a stranger, and ye took me not in," and the sentence is, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire !" A shadow of this awful wrath of the Lamb we see in David. But as man is imperfect, David's wrath, though just, was passionate and violent, and he even swore a rash and cruel oath, more like a Bedouin chief than the anointed of the Lord. But intercession was on the way: just as the Church is always entreating for the fallen, for her enemies, persecutors and slanderers, so while Nabal was rioting without a thought of his danger, his wise and good wife had prepared her gifts, bread and wine, skins and sheep, and raisins and figs, and set forth with them to propitiate the outlaw. She met him, and threw herself on the ground before him, beseeching him to view the insult as proceeding from a weak, foolish creature, not worth his vengeance. It almost seems as if Nabal might have been a nickname grown into a name, since it expresses his silliness. She goes on to entreat him to accept her gift as a tribute to one who was fighting the battles of the Lord, and who must prevail because no fault was in him. It is true that a man (she will not mention the King) is persecuting him, but in a curious Eastern phrase she declares that David's soul is bound up in the bundle of the living ones, whose life is in the Lord, precious and safe in His sight, while the souls of his enemies should be cast away like a stone from a sling. She represents what a comfort it would be, when he came to his greatness, not to have shed blood causelessly.

David perfectly owned it. His tender heart had recovered from his first rage ; he knew his oath had been a sinful one, and he was most thankful that she had saved him from staining himself with a savage revenge. Nabal meanwhile feasted on, and was not sober enough to hear of his danger till morning. Then he became as a stone, but he repented not, and in ten days, like the rich fool in the Gospel, he was smitten and died ; and David, when he heard it, gave the more thanks that it had not been his own hand that had returned evil on Nabal, but that he had left him to the Lord.

David's wife Michal had been given by her father Saul to another man. It is impossible not to wonder how much better it might have been for both, if Michal, as she surely might with Jonathan's

help, have held out against her father, and remained constant, or perhaps fled to join the husband of her youth. Then perhaps the lineage of Saul might still have continued on the throne, and she might have had her share in the promises to David, and David might have been saved from that fault, forbidden in the Book of Deuteronomy, the multiplying of wives on the king's part like other Eastern princes—the fault that was the cause of almost all the sins and troubles of his after-life. It seems to have been only on the tidings of Michal's having a new husband that he gave up his faithfulness to her, and married not only the wise and beautiful Abigail, but another woman, named Ahinoam.

LESSON LXXXI.

SAUL'S SPEAR.

I SAM. xxvi. 5—25.

B.C. 1059.—*A second time did the treacherous men of Ziph send to inform Saul of David's being in their neighbourhood, and Saul set forth against him, accompanied by Abner, the captain of his army, and a troop of warriors.*

And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched : and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host : and Saul lay in the trench,* and the people pitched round about him.

Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp ? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee.

So David and Abishai came to the people by night : and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster ; but Abner and the people lay round about him.

Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day : now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.

And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not ; for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless ?

David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him ; or his day shall come to die ; or he shall descend into battle, and perish.

* Among the waggons.

The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed : but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse* of water, and let us go.

So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster ; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked : for they were all asleep ; because a deep sleep from the LORD was fallen upon them :

Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of an hill afar off ; a great space being between them :

And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner ? Then Abner answered and said, Who art thou that criest to the king ?

And David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man ? and who is like to thee in Israel ? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king ? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord.

This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the LORD liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster.

And Saul knew David's voice, and said, Is this thy voice, my son David ? And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king.

And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant ? for what have I done ? or what evil is in mine hand ?

Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the LORD have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering : but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the LORD ; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, Go, serve other gods.

Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the LORD : for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains.

Then said Saul, I have sinned : return, my son David : for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul† was precious in thine eyes this day : behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.

And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear ! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it.

The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness : for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to-day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed.

And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation.

Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David : thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

COMMENT.—Saul and his army, unable as yet to find David, lay down to sleep in a narrow valley, with their waggons making an

* Jar.

† Life.

treasure found them as before at Eliah, and as is still done in such circumstances. The lion near planted in the ground marked the spot where the shaft, as indeed the spear seems to have been Saul's, lay, and he kept it fast in his hand. David, watching on the hill, heard all over the buzz of voices and the clank of arms died into silence, and proposed to his brave, swift-footed nephew, Abishai, to go on for a better quarry, to come with him, as we should say to go and reinforce Saul's camp.

With the support of waggon wheels they went. If watchers had seen at such a time sleep had overpowered them. No one moved, and David and Abishai presently stood where Saul lay sleeping, with his tall spear beside him, and his jar of water at his boister, made to slake his thirst, and all around lay his mighty men, and there among them, Abishai thought of all the cruelty and injustice he people had suffered. He felt as if this were the moment God had appointed for revenge, and whispered that he would nail Saul to be ground with his own spear, and so surely that he would not be ground below!

But David did saw in Saul the Lord's anointed, and still held faithfully to his resolution that his hand should never be lifted against his father-in-law, nor would he slay a sleeping enemy. He felt with some pleasure at catching out his old captain Abner in keeping such a bad watch, bade Abishai carry away the spear and water jar, and then, safely passing out of the camp again, he made his way to the brow of the overhanging cliff, where he could not be reached, though his voice could be plainly heard in the camp below. Thence he shouted to Abner, calling him by name, and charging him with ill defending the King's person: "for see," he said, "where is the King's spear and cruse of water." The call awoke Saul, and again the old feeling so far revived that he asked, "is this thy voice, my son David?" Then David again pled his cause. The meaning of his words seems to be, if it were for any sin of his own that God had stirred Saul up to persecute him, then he would offer sacrifice to atone for it; but if Saul were incited against him by slanderous men (such as Doeg and Cush), then they were incurring a curse from the Lord, for they were driving him out

Land of Promise to dwell among the heathen, and be tempted by their gods. Once again Saul was touched, relented, and

even blessed David. For a moment he saw and felt that wonderful patience and forbearance, but his heart hardened itself again, and his last chance of reconciliation with David on earth and with God in heaven slipped by, and for ever!

LESSON LXXXII.

DAVID AT ZIKLAG.

B.C. 1058.—1 SAM. xxvii. ; 1 CHRON. xii. 1, 2 ; 1 SAM. xxviii. 1, 2.

And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul : there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines ; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel : so shall I escape out of his hand.

And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maach, king of Gath.

And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife,

And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath : and he sought no more again for him.

And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there : for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?

Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day : wherefore Ziklag pertaineth* unto the kings of Judah unto this day.

And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months.

[Now there came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself close because of Saul the son of Kish : and they were among the mighty men, helpers of the war.

They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin.]

And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites : for those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt.

And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish.

* R-lings.

And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road * to day? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites.

And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, saying, lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines.

And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.

And it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men.

And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do. And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head for ever.

COMMENT.—In David's last interview with Saul, he had spoken of being driven to take up his abode among the heathen; and probably some new token of Saul's implacable hatred, and of the impossibility of finding trustworthy shelter even in his own tribe of Judah, led him to resolve on so doing. It seems as if his faith had failed him, and that he had for a while lost that perfect trust in God which had hitherto borne him through so many troubles, and the step he now took carried him out of the sacred land, and involved him in a whole web of double-dealing. Again he repaired to Gath, the city of the Philistines, but this time in a very different manner from when he came as the solitary fugitive forced to feign madness. He brought six hundred warriors with him, and he himself and many more brought their wives, children, and property, and he presented himself to Achish as a deserter from Saul and his kingdom, begging that a city might be assigned for the residence of the tribe he brought with him. Achish gave him Ziklag, one of the border cities between Judah and Philistia, and he was thus able to preserve his people from the corruption of the Hittite idolatry; and indeed he had with him Abiathar the priest, and the ephod, with the Urim and Thummim. There he was joined even by some of Saul's own kindred, and there he remained for a year and four months, keeping his men employed in warlike expeditions against the Geshurites, who seem to have been of the old race of inhabitants before the Philistines; the Gezrites, who were Canaanites; and the robber

* An inroad or attack.

Amalekites, with whom the Lord had proclaimed war for ever. Against all these he might rightly and justly make war; but when Achish inquired where he had been fighting, he replied, with something of equivocation, "against the south of Judah." He had really been to the southward of Judah, but he led Achish to suppose that his plunder came from Judah instead of from the heathen tribes beyond; and the King, supposing that he was thus for ever alienated from his own people, believed him attached for ever to his service, and when about to renew the war with Saul, summoned him to his camp. David made no promise to fight against his brethren; he only said, "Thou shalt know what thy servant can do," leaving the future to be decided by the event. It is a part of his history in which it would seem as if for a time wavering trust was leading to duplicity, and probably likewise to cruelty and rapine, and that these forays chiefly marked him as a man of blood, unworthy of the highest privilege to which he aspired.

LESSON LXXXIII.

THE AMALEKITE FORAY ON ZIKLAG.

B.C. 1055.—I SAM. xxix.; xxx. 1—6.

Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel.

And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward* with Achish.

Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, on these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?

And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men?†

Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

* The guard in the rear, or behind.

† How better should he buy his pardon from Saul than by betraying them?

Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight : for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day : nevertheless the lords favour thee not.

Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines.

And David said unto Achish, But what have I done ? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king ?

And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God : notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle.

Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with thy master's servants that are come with thee : and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart.

So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire ;

And had taken the women captives, that were therein : they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.

So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire ; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives.

Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.

And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.

And David was greatly distressed ; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters : but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

COMMENT.—The Philistines, after David had dwelt for a year in Ziklag, mustered all their host for a great attack upon Israel, marching into the great plain of Jezreel, north of the hills of Judah and Benjamin. David and his warriors joined Achish's division. What he meant to do we know not, but he was saved from fighting against his own countrymen by the distrust of the Philistine lords, who could not believe that he would not turn against them, and insisted on Achish sending him away again. David remonstrated, asking whether he had ever shown any sign of want of good faith ; and Achish owned that he had always seemed to him like an angel.

— though we ought to be afraid rashly to censure the holy men of
would seem that throughout this sojourn among the Philis-

tines David had not been acting worthily, and a terrible chastisement was in store for him, ere he could recover his faithful trust and free spirit. When he and his warriors reached Ziklag, it was to find that the robber Amalekites had taken advantage of their absence to lay the city waste, burn, destroy, drive off the cattle, and bear away the women and children as captives, David's own two wives among them.

When they came to the grievous scene and beheld the smoking ruins, David and his men wept aloud—all wept together till they had no power to weep: and then grief began to turn to rage; there were savage murmurs among them that this desolation had come of David's joining the Philistine army, and there were even whispers of stoning him. But David meanwhile was encouraging himself in the Lord:—

I am feeble and sore broken :
I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.
Lord, all my desire is before thee ;
And my groaning is not hid from thee.
My heart panteth, my strength faileth me :
As for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me.
My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore ;
And my kinsmen stand afar off.
They also that seek after my life lay snares for me :
And they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine
 deceits all the day long.
But I, as a deaf man, heard not ;
And I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth.
Thus I was as a man that heareth not,
And in whose mouth are no reproofs.
For in thee, O LORD, do I hope :
Thou wilt hear, O LORD my God.
For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me :
When my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me.

He was pouring out his soul in deep penitence and sore lamentation, sighing at the cruel loss he had sustained, and at the anger and alienation of his kinsmen, probably the nephews, who were hot and hasty men; but patiently bearing their rage, not defending himself, but enduring it like one who was dumb, leaving the cause to his God—praying to Him instead of answering man. And in all this meek silence, was not David foreshowing and prophesying of One whose disciples forsook Him and fled, and who, when placed

before His accusers, answered never a word? And in the ensuing Psalm, the 39th, David owns that the stroke came from God, therefore he dares not complain, even while he earnestly entreats for pardon and restoration, that he may continue his pilgrimage like his fathers:—

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ;
 Because thou didst it.
 Remove thy stroke away from me :
 I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.
 When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity,
 Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth :
 Surely every man is vanity.
 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry ;
 Hold not thy peace at my tears :
 For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.
 O spare me, that I may recover strength,
 Before I go hence, and be no more.

How wonderful was the fulfilment ! It was from this deepest moment of dejection at Ziklag that David's glory began.

LESSON LXXXIV.

THE PURSUIT.

B.C. 1055.—1 SAM. xxx. 7—26.

And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David.

And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.

So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed.

But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor.

And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water;

they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no drunk any water, three days and three nights.

And David said unto him, To whom belondest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick.

We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongeth to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire.

And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company? And he said, Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company.

And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah.

And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.

And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives.

And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all.

And David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drave before those other cattle, and said, This is David's spoil.

And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that were with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them.

Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them aught of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart.

Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand.

For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike.

And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.

And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.

COMMENT.—After his earnest prayer, David caused the priest Abiathar to consult the Urim, and the reply bade him pursue the enemy, and promised that he should recover all he had lost. It further appears (from the Book of Chronicles) that some of the tribe

of Manasseh had joined him instead of Saul—probably seeing that in him lay the hope of Israel. They were all mighty men and captains of the host, the Book says; and they helped him against the “bands of the rovers.” On then he went, with his 600, so speedily that at the brook Besor 200 were exhausted and had to be left behind, while the rest followed the track of the spoilers towards the southern desert. Presently they came to a man lying exhausted and nearly dead, and when they had given him food and water, he was able to tell them that he was an Egyptian slave, in bondage to the Amalekites, who no doubt had stolen him in his youth. He said the marauders had plundered the south of Judah, and the Cherethites—a word believed to mean Cretans, and to denote the Philistines most recently come from Crete—and they had burnt Ziklag, all the country being bare of defenders on account of the war. On the way back the poor slave had fallen sick, and had been left by his cruel master to die, without food or water. He had tasted nothing for three days, and when David succoured him and swore not to restore him to his master, he promised to lead the pursuers to where they could fall upon the Amalekites. Thus this act of cruelty brought its punishment. The Egyptian guided the 400 to the halting-place where the savage Amalekites were revelling in their spoil, all spread abroad upon the earth, feasting and drinking and dancing in joy at the great spoils they had brought away. So complete was the victory that David gained over them, that none escaped except 400 of the most active, who rode away upon swift camels or dromedaries. The whole of the spoil of Ziklag was recovered, and all the wives and children—not one was missing—and an immense quantity besides of the plunder collected from other places, so that huge flocks and herds were driven before the victors, while they sung “This is David’s spoil!” The 200 who had waited exhausted came to meet them on their return, but the fiercer and more lawless spirits declared that they had no share in the spoil, but should receive nothing but their wives and children. Then David showed himself a true and just leader. He not only gave their full share to the 200, but established it as a rule of the Israelite army, that those left on guard at the camp should be held to have done as good service as those who fought in the battle. It was a wise law, since it secured order, and

hindered undue pressing forward in search of spoil; and many a beautiful thought has been founded on it to comfort those who have to serve God by *hearing* instead of *doing* His will:—"He Thy glory also shares, who *waits* beside the tent." Of David's own portion, he sent presents to those in Judah who had befriended him, and perhaps to those who had been robbed in the Amalekite inroad.

LESSON LXXXV.*

THE PROPHETICAL THANKSGIVING.

B.C. 1055.—PSALM xl.

I waited patiently for the LORD ;
 And he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay,
 And set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.
 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God :
 Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.
 Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust,
 And respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast
 done,
 And thy thoughts, which are to us-ward :
 They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee :
 If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be
 numbered.
 Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire ;
 Mine ears hast thou opened :
 Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required.
 Then said I, Lo, I come :
 In the volume of the book it is written of me,
 I delight to do thy will, O my God :
 Yea, thy law is within my heart.
 I have preached righteousness in the great congregation :
 Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest.
 I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart ;†
 I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation :
 I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great
 congregation.
 Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD :
 Let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me.

* Not for the younger ones.

† I have made it known.

For innumerable evils have compassed me about :
Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to
look up ;
They are more than the hairs of mine head : therefore my heart
faileth me.
Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me :
O LORD, make haste to help me.
Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my
soul to destroy it ;
Let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil.
Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me,
Aha, Aha.
Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee :
Let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be mag-
nified.
But I am poor and needy ; yet the LORD thinketh upon me :
Thou art my help and my deliverer ;
Make no tarrying, O my God.

COMMENT.—David had encouraged himself in the Lord in his utmost distress, before his ruined home at Ziklag. Though the title does not tell us so, there is great reason to think that this 40th Psalm was his thanksgiving, a song of praise all full of inspiration and prophecy far beyond what he knew. See how he looked at his long years of patient waiting, and the dangers and miseries he had undergone, in “dens and caves of the earth ;” till now joy and hope were before him, and he was singing a new song of thanksgiving. Trusting solely to God, and not to man, he had gained this mighty victory. Be it observed that it was over the Amalekites, the very people whom Saul had failed to destroy, when he had offered that false excuse to which Samuel had replied by telling him that to obey is better than sacrifice. So here David, who in this exile can offer no sacrifice, consoles himself by the assurance that to open his ears to hear and to do God’s will is acceptable. He promises to show forth in word and in life that will ; and then again he prays earnestly for aid and mercy, feeling that his sins are more in number than the hairs of his head ; and looking about at the number of deadly foes around, he prays that their discomfiture may be soon, and that the deliverance so long promised to him may not long be delayed.

But this prayer stretched much further. Nay, it is not David’s prayer : these ~~are~~ the words of the Son of David. He it is who patiently fulfilled His time on earth, and went down into the

horrible pit, namely, the grave. He it is who, because no sacrifice could avail to atone for sin, took upon Him the form of a servant, and, according as was written from the foundation of the world, perfectly fulfilled His Father's will, and preached His righteousness throughout the congregation. Satan and all his company were utterly confounded by His resurrection from the dead, and ever since the cry of the faithful has been "The Lord be praised."

Therefore, because this Psalm of David is the voice of our Lord in His sacrifice, does the Church sing it on Good Friday, as, indeed, St. Paul has guided us to the application (Heb. x.) :—

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me :

In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt-offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein ; which are offered by the law ;

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.

Here St. Paul has followed the Greek translation, which reads, instead of "opened mine ear," "prepared me a body." It is one of the cases that here and there occur in the Bible, where, though the first meaning of the original has become uncertain, yet two equally deep and heavenly meanings have become attached to it. Either way, David, when offering his own imperfect obedience, was taught by God the Holy Ghost to foretel the Christ's perfect obedience and all-sufficient sacrifice.

LESSON LXXXVI.*

THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

B.C. 1055.—1 SAM. xxviii. 3—25.

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land.

And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched

* Not for the younger ones.

in Shunem : and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa.

And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled.

And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor.

And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night : and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.

And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land : wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, As the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.

Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.

And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice : and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.

And the king said unto her, Be not afraid : for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up ; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed ; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams : therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.

Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?

And the LORD hath done to him as he spake by me : for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David :

Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day.

Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines : and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me : the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel : and there was no strength in him ; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night.

And the woman came unto Saul, and saw that he was sore troubled, and said unto him, Behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have

put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me.

Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thine handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee ; and eat, that thou mayest have strength when thou goest on thy way.

But he refused, and said, I will not eat. But his servants, together with the woman, compelled him ; and he hearkened unto their voice. So he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed.

And the woman had a fat calf in the house ; and she hasted, and killed it, and took flour, and kneaded it, and did bake unleavened bread thereof :

And she brought it before Saul, and before his servants ; and they did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night.

COMMENT.—Very remarkable was the contrast. At the moment when David was encouraging himself in the Lord, obtaining guidance from the Urim, and singing under the full flood of inspiration, Saul was despairing in the desolation he had made for himself. Not only was the great prophet of his youth dead, but he had driven away David and his inspired songs. He was at enmity with the colleges of prophets ; he had slain the priests, and had no communion left him with God and with good spirits. Here were the Philistines trooping in through Israel, encamping round Mount Tabor in such a host as had never come since Samuel's restoration. What was to be done ? The unhappy man must needs lean on some guidance from the unseen world ; and having cut himself off from God, he turned towards those who professed to have the power of dealing with the evil spirits of hell. Whether they truly had such dealings, or whether all were imposture, we cannot tell for certain ; but before our Lord came the devils had more power ; and it often seems as if they did at times reply and use their angel-powers to deceive and delude men. At any rate, the professing to deal with them was strongly forbidden by the law of Moses—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Ex. xxxii. 18) ;—and Saul in his earlier days had obeyed the command, and put to death all such persons ; but now, as from his camp on the mountains of Gilboa he looked down on the mighty armies of Philistia, his heart sank ; and obtaining no reply from heaven, he asked where to find means of gaining one from hell. He was told of a woman at Endor—Endor, beyond Mount Tabor, where Gideon had slain Zeba and Zalmunna, "who perished at Endor, and became as the dung of the earth." It was far away, seven or eight miles off, out on the other side of the

enemy's camp ; but the despairing King disguised himself, and set forth with two attendants, by night, to the village built on a rock, full of gloomy caverns. There, the woman thought, when first the tall warrior prayed her to use her art, that he meant to inform against her to the King, and he was forced to swear to her that such was not his intention. Then he bade her summon the spirit of Samuel. It seems as though the woman had no power or expectation of really calling the holy prophet from his rest, though she might pretend to do so ; but in this case God permitted that he should verily appear, for, when he did so, she was overwhelmed and confounded with alarm and surprise, and perceived that her inquirer could only be the King. Gods, she said—namely, the most majestic and awful presence she could describe—were ascending out of the earth, even an old man covered with a mantle. Saul bowed himself, and the spirit spake—"Why hast thou disquieted me?" Then Saul made his lament—how piteous in contrast with the glorious hope of his youth. His enemies upon him—God departed from him ! And not one word of hope was spoken by the stern holy spirit. The Lord had become his enemy. It was the work of his own wilfulness ; and the next day should be a day of defeat. By night, not Saul alone, but his sons, should be with the dead ! No wonder the miserable man lay straight like one dead upon the earth ! Even the witch pitied him. He had eaten no food for the whole day in his distress, and lay faint and exhausted ; but she forced food on him, and in her dark abode he ate his last meal, and gathered strength at least to fight his last battle like a king, though in utter despair. It is said by those who have been saved from drowning that the whole of their past lives rushed over their memory in one moment. Do not these words of Samuel, in like manner, bring back the turning-point of Saul's life ? Oh ! let us have no turning-point for the worse !

LESSON LXXXVII.

THE BATTLE OF MOUNT GILBOA.

B.C. 1055.—1 SAM. xxxi. 1—12; 2 SAM. iv. 4; 1 CHRON. x. 10, 11.

Now the Philistines fought against Israel : and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa.

And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons ; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons.

And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him ; and he was sore wounded of the archers.

Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith ; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armour-bearer would not ; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

And when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.

So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men, that same day together.

And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled ; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa.

And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people.

And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth : and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan, and his head in the temple of Dagon.*

And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul ;

All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there.

And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled : and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD,

* From the Book of Chronicles.

even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it ;

And enquired not of the LORD : therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

COMMENT.—All that the unhappy Saul had gained by his night journey to Endor was the warning to “despair and die.” He had hardened his soul till his time for repentance was over, and all that was left for him was to fight his last battle. And now he was joined by Jonathan, whom we have not heard of since his last farewell to David in the wood of Ziph. He had held aloof from all his father’s crimes, but he came forth in his faithful valour to fight his last battle by his side, true to the last, the perfect pattern of son and friend. The terrible battle was fought on the broad plain of Jezreel, but Israel gave back and back, and the King and his sons, Benjamite mountaineers, retreated on the bare, bleak, rugged ridge of Gilboa which rose behind them, on the way to their own hills. But the Philistines pressed sore upon them. Jonathan was not to be the second unto David in his kingdom, but was instead to leave him “the pure, calm picture of a blameless friend.” There in the mountains, he and his brothers died the death of brave men, giving their lives for their country.

Saul was not so happy. Wounded by Philistine arrows, unable to fly any further, and with his sons lying dead around him, he knew he must soon be overtaken by the Philistines, and his proud stubborn heart revolted at the thought of the scorn and abuse they would heap upon him as upon Samson before. Had there been place for penitence left in his heart, he would have accepted these insults as his punishment, and risen to new life out of them, like Samson and like Manasseh long after. But in the cowardice of pride, he sought to escape by bidding his armour-bearer slay him, and when the man had not nerve to do so, he planted his sword in the earth and threw himself on the point ; and his miserable example was followed by his attendant. It seems, however, that he did not die at once, and suffered still further indignity and misery. At any rate, the Philistines found him dead when they came the next day to strip the slain. They carried his corpse and those of his sons to Beth-shan, a Canaanite fortress on the slope of Gilboa, never yet taken by Israel, and fastened them in triumph on the wall ; they sent his

head to the temple where Dagon had once fallen before the Ark, and dedicated his armour to the Moon-goddess; and the tidings were proclaimed in all their cities, while the Israelites rushed in terror to the other side of the Jordan. Even Gibeah was not safe, and, in escaping, Jonathan's only child fell from his nurse's arms and was lamed for life. But there was noble gratitude left in Israel. Saul's first exploit, forty years before, had been the rescue of Jabesh-gilead, far beyond Jordan, and when the tidings reached that place, the inhabitants could not brook that the remains of their benefactor should thus remain exposed as those of one accursed; but all the valiant men—and most valiant they must have been—forded the Jordan, made their way through the land, overrun as it was with foes, came by night to Beth-shan, and took down the four corpses,—the headless, mutilated body of Saul, and the other three. In the state to which they must have come they could not well be carried far, so as soon as it could safely be done, the Gileadites halted, burnt the flesh from the bones, carried these home, and laid them in a grave beneath the great terebinth-tree before their own city. So sadly closed Saul's reign of self-will. The King "like the nations" ended like a heathen king of the nations, and as God said to Israel by the mouth of Hosea (xiii. 10, 11):—

Thou saidst, "Give me a king and princes."
I gave thee a king in mine anger,
And took him away in my wrath.

LESSON LXXXVIII.

THE TIDINGS TO DAVID.

B.C. 1055.—2 SAM. i. 1—16.

Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag;

It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance.

And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped.

And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also.

And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?

And the young man that told him said, As I happened* by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him.

And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I.

And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite.

He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me.

So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.

Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him:

And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.

And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite.

And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?

And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died.

And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD's anointed.

COMMENT.—With the battle of Mount Gilboa ends the First Book of Samuel. It was probably set in hand by the great prophet himself, and continued by the prophets in his college at Ramah, by whom we may suppose the second book that bears his name was likewise written. They are also, and more correctly, called the First and Second Books of Kings, and those that follow them the Third and Fourth. At this date, too—1055 before our Lord—nearly the first about which there is no manner of doubt—begins the history in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Chronicles properly mean a time-book, and there seem to have been such chronicles kept from the beginning of the kingdom; but the books

* Came.

that bear the name were compiled from these by Ezra, leaving out all that was not to the purpose. The earlier chapters are occupied with the genealogies of the chief divisions of the tribes, also of the priests, and of the kings ; and the history opens with the 10th chapter, when David was finally delivered from Saul.

David learnt the lamentable story of Mount Gilboa two days after his victorious return to Ziklag. Then an Amalekite—a wild robber of the desert—made his appearance, clad as if to announce a misfortune, but really expecting reward. The man showed himself a liar ; for first he professed to be a fugitive from the camp of Israel ; then, when that would not serve, he accounted for his knowledge with—"As I happened by chance on Mount Gilboa." The chance was evidently the thirst for plunder. He had come to strip the slain, and had been beforehand with the Philistines ; for he brought the circlet from Saul's helmet, and the bracelet from his arm. He told likewise a story of his having found Saul still alive, and having at his entreaty killed him outright. If it were true, it brought round the just vengeance of God, that he who had disobeyed in the matter of the Amalekites should die by the hand of one of that savage horde. Whether true or false, this story brought the plunderer a very different reward from what he expected. David caused him to be put to death for having violated the "sanctity that doth hedge a king ;" and then the generous-hearted David became the leader in a general lamentation, not only for Jonathan, his much-loved and faithful friend, but for Saul, his foe and persecutor. All his enmity was forgotten—only his brave deeds and high spirit remembered. David composed a most beautiful song of lamentation for the father and son, which was preserved in Jasher, "the book of heroes," together with Joshua's miracle at Aijalon. He also bade Israel learn the use of the bow. It is not clear whether this means that the tune of the dirge was called the Bow, in honour of Jonathan's skill in archery, or whether David bade the art of archery to be practised, that the Philistine archers might be met on equal terms.

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places :
How are the mighty fallen !
Tell it not in Gath,
Publish it not in the streets of Askelon ;
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,

Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.
Ye mountains of Gilboa,
Let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you,
Nor fields of offerings :
For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away,
The shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.
From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.
Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided :
They were swifter than eagles :
They were stronger than lions.
Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights,
Who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.
How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle !
O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan :
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me :
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.
How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished !

Scarcely a word need be said to point out the beauty of this dirge, grieving first for the defeat of Israel and the triumph of her enemies. Then comes the lament for the King and Prince, with all honour done to their great exploits of old, and to that wonderful beauty of union which Jonathan's dutifulness and forbearance had always preserved, and which made them die together.

And lastly comes David's deep and most pathetic personal bewailing of his own most noble-hearted friend—

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan :
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me :
Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Yes, for Jonathan's love had endured where his sister Michal's had failed. It was the purest, most free from jealousy or rivalry, of which we have any record ; and, truly, Jonathan is one of the most perfect characters that Scripture has shown us. Yet he died for his father's sin an untimely death in a lost battle, to show that even in that old Israelite dispensation the rest for the people of God lay beyond this life.

LESSON LXXXIX.

DAVID KING AT HEBRON.

B.C. 1055 TO 1050.—2 SAM. ii. 1—17.

And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.

So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite.

And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.

And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul.

And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the LORD, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him.

And now the LORD shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing.

Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.

But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim;

And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.

Ish-bosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.

And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.

And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.

And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise.

Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David.

And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword

in his fellow's side ; so they fell down together : wherefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim,* which is in Gibeon.

And there was a very sore battle that day ; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.

COMMENT.—The overthrow and destruction of Saul's army had been so terrible that the Philistines were overrunning all the land of Israel west of Jordan, and would have conquered it entirely but for David and his gallant little band, the Manassite captains, the lion-faced men of Gad, with his original adventurous band from Adullam, and all his mighty men, the great Levite Benaiah, and his fierce nephews, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, the sons of his sister Zeruiah and of a man called Suri. This little band, trained by many years of hardship, were the saving of Israel. David saw the time was come, but first he "inquired of the Lord," and received from Him permission to return into Judah. Thence then he came to Hebron, the city close to which Abraham had dwelt and received the promise, and now lay buried. He made his followers bring all their families with them, as returning to their homes, and was gladly welcomed by all the men of his own tribe of Judah, who called on the priest to anoint him again as their king. He was now thirty years old, and from this time his reign is reckoned as having begun. The beautiful 27th Psalm, which begins "The Lord is my light," is thought to have been his thanksgiving at this time. It contains a verse that shows the longing of his heart, now that prosperity was setting in upon him in the freshness of his kingdom:—

One thing have I desired of the LORD, which I will require :
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the fair beauty of the LORD, and to visit his temple.

This was his prime desire, he who had never seen the tabernacle all his days. Still he had to exhort his soul to patience:—

O tarry thou the LORD's leisure.
Be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart ;
And put thou thy trust in the LORD.

And so it was that David began his reign at the same age at which our Lord began his ministry.

His faithful love to Saul and Jonathan were shown in the grateful thanks he sent to the men of Jabesh-gilead for their pious care for their bodies. Still he was only king over the Judean hills. After

* The field of heroes.

five years of disorganization, Abner, the brave cousin of Saul, who had been captain of his host—a stern, honourable old soldier, faithful to his master and his family, but with little more sense of an obedience to the will of God than Saul himself—succeeded in rallying the remnant of the family at Mahanaim, on the eastward of the Jordan, the place that Jacob had named from the camps of angels he saw there on his return from Padan-aram. Saul's elder and braver sons had all died on Mount Gilboa, but there remained Ishbosheth, who was forty years old, and who seems to have been a weak and helpless creature. Abner placed him on the throne, but could not anoint him; and David had no scruple in opposing him. Indeed, David had been an anointed king five years when Ishbosheth was set up against him, and Abner marched forth from Mahanaim into the land of Judah to call for the submission of the tribe. David did not go forth against them himself, but sent his three nephews with his forces. They met on the east side of the hill of Gibeon, where, beneath a low cliff in the valley clothed with olives, lay a large pool or reservoir of water. Here the captains met and discoursed together, and Abner made his proposal, "Let the young men arise and play before us." This play is believed to have meant that the decision, whether David or Ishbosheth should reign, should be made by a combat between twelve men of Judah and of Benjamin, as champions on either side, before the whole army. The twelve were equally matched on either side, and all killed one another! This brought on a general battle between both armies, in which Abner and his men were routed and forced to take to flight.

LESSON XC.

THE PURSUIT FROM GIBEON.

B.C. 1050.—2 SAM. ii. 18—32; iii. 1, 2, 6.

And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe.

And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.

Then Abner looked behind him, and said, Art thou Asahel? And he answered, I am.

And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour. But Asahel would not turn aside from following of him.

And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me : wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?

Howbeit he refused to turn aside : wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him ; and he fell down there, and died in the same place : and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.

Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner : and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon.

And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of an hill.

Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?

And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother.

So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more.

And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain, and passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron,* and they came to Mahanaim.

And Joab returned from following Abner : and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel.

But the servants of David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, so that three hundred and threescore men died.

And they took up Asahel, and buried him in the sepulchre of his father, which was in Beth-lehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at break of day.

Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David : but David waxed† stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.

And unto David were sons born in Hebron :

And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.

COMMENT.—The battle between the followers of Abner and of Joab had become a rout. The supporters of Ishbosheth fled along the winding valleys between the hills of Judah, closely pursued by David's men, headed by Joab and his two brothers. The

* The grove.

† Became.

youngest of them, Asahel, was a youth, and swift of foot as a gazelle, and he kept in advance of the rest till he was close upon Abner, hoping perhaps to strike the decisive blow of all. But the mighty old warrior had pity on the spirited youth, who was no match for him, and whose brothers had once fought under him. He bade him turn aside and take the armour of one of the fallen. Whether he meant this as a spoil and trophy such as might content the boy, or whether it was the generous desire not to fight with an undefended person, is not clear; at any rate young Asahel would not take the friendly advice, even when again entreated by the old captain not to force on his own death, and thus leave ill-feeling between his slayer and Joab. At last Abner was unwillingly obliged to defend himself, and with one thrust from the hinder end of his spear, where there was a spike to fasten it into the ground, he ended young Asahel's pursuit and life. Every one who came to the bleeding corpse of the brave lad stood still in dismay, but his brothers were pressing hotly on till sunset, when Abner had gained the top of a hill, and thence shouted in a commanding tone to Joab, "Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it shall be bitterness in the latter end?"—the true account of all civil war—reminding him that these were their brethren whom they were slaying. Joab, with the old habit of obedience to the mighty captain of the host, obeyed, and Abner and his broken army crossed the Jordan by night and returned to Mahanaim. There is certainly something grand about Abner. His error seems to have been in never trying to own or follow the will of God.

As Joab and Abishai returned they came upon the body of their young brother, the only man whom they had lost except the twelve in the battle ordeal at Gibeon, a loss that filled Joab with bitter hatred and malice against Abner, unheeding his long forbearance. They turned aside to Bethlehem, near at hand, where the family sepulchres were, and there young Asahel was buried, with the Eastern dirges and lamentations sounding for the gazelle-footed youth all night long, ere the victorious army returned to Hebron. For two years more the warfare continued between the two kings, but always with advantage to David, while Ishbosheth's sole defence was the skill and boldness of Abner.

LESSON XCI.

THE DEATH OF ABNER.

B.C. 1048.—2 SAM. iii. 7—30.

And Saul had a concubine,* whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ish-bosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?

Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ish-bosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do shew kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to-day with a fault concerning this woman?

So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so I do to him;

To translate† the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beer-sheba.

And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him.

And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land? saying also, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee.

And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face.

And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred Philistines.

And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish.

And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned.

And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you:

Now then do it: for the LORD hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies.

And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin.

So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast.

And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that

* Inferior wife.

† Transfer, or take from one to give to the other.

thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace.

And, behold, the servants of David and Joab came from pursuing a troop, and brought in a great spoil with them: but Abner was not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace.

When Joab and all the host that was with him were come, they told Joab, saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the-king, and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace.

Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone?

Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest.

And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew it not.

And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.

And afterward when David heard it, he said,

I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever
From the blood of Abner the son of Ner.
Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house;
And let there not fail from the house of Joab
One that is a leper,
Or that leaneth on a staff,
Or that falleth on the sword,
Or that lacketh bread.

So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.

And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier.

And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner: and all the people wept. *

And the king lamented over Abner, and said,

Died Abner as a fool dieth?
Thy hands were not bound,
Nor thy feet put into fetters:
As a man falleth before wicked men,
So fellest thou.

And all the people wept again over him.

And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or aught else, till the sun be down.

And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.

For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner.

And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?

And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.

COMMENT.—Abner's loyalty did not depend on fearing God as well as honouring the king. It was self-willed, and so it broke down. Saul had had an inferior wife named Rizpah, who must have been a remarkable woman. Now, in the East, to take to wife a royal widow is esteemed as equivalent to treason, and when—either truly or falsely, we do not know which—Ishbosheth reproved Abner with having taken her, he was so greatly offended that for the first time he accepted the decree that the kingdom was to be taken from Saul, and openly telling poor weak Ishbosheth his intention, he sent proposals of friendship to David. The answer was, that David would listen to none till his wife Michal was restored. This would be the acknowledgment on her brother's part that David had suffered great injustice, and Abner fulfilled the condition, Michal's husband following her all the way weeping; and she seems to have been regarded as David's queen wife, though he now had six others.

Then Abner sent to the elders, namely, the chiefs of all the other tribes, and proposed to them to accept David. Benjamin, his own tribe and that of Saul, seems to have been the least willing, and on their behalf he came to David at Hebron, while Joab was away on a foray against the Philistines. David, who had always esteemed and honoured his old captain, made him a feast, and he went away promising to collect the chiefs of the tribes to acknowledge David.

But Joab, returning, was filled with rage and jealousy. Not only was he savagely revengeful for his young brother Asahel's death, but he could not hope to be the first man in the army if Abner was there. He went to his uncle, and fiercely and disrespectfully rebuked him for receiving Abner, who, he declared, could only have come as a spy; and then, sending a treacherous message secretly to Abner, he brought him back to Hebron, and there murdered him just outside the gate, his conduct cruelly contrasting with Abner's forbear-

ance to Asahel. Now Hebron was a priestly city, one of the cities of refuge, where a man who had slain another could remain unmolested until pursued by the nearest of kin—the revenger of blood—and then tried by the elders; and the cunning assassin had so contrived as to be close to the gates, where no kinsman of Abner was likely to follow. David therefore could not punish him, and for some reason the fierce and unscrupulous Joab had become so strong, that even the king could not prevail against him. Most likely he had a determined party among the outlawed adventurers who had joined David in his wanderings, had become more cruel and violent during the marauding expeditions from Ziklag, and had been ready to stone their leader at the first disaster. If so, Joab's evil influence was the consequence of David's error in flying to the Philistines. All David could do was to make a solemn protest. He laid Joab under a judicial solemn curse, from which the city of refuge could not shelter him, and he composed a beautiful and majestic funereal lamentation for all his faithful men to sing at the burial of the brave old captain of the army.

LESSON XCII.

DAVID KING OVER ISRAEL.

B.C. 1048.—2 SAM. iv. and 1 CHRON. xiii. *collated.*

And when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled.

And Saul's son had two men that were captains of hands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin:

And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, who lay on a bed at noon.

And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth rib: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped.

For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night.

And they brought the head of Ish-bosheth unto David to Hebron, and

said to the king, Behold the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life ; and the LORD hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed.

And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the LORD liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity,

When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings :

How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed ? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth ?

And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.

* * * * *

Then all Israel gathered themselves to David unto Hebron, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.

And moreover in time past, even when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel : and the LORD thy God said unto thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel.

Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king to Hebron ; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the LORD ; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel.

All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel : and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king.

And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking : for their brethren had prepared for them.

Moreover they that were nigh them, even unto Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, and meat, meal, cakes of figs, and bunches of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep abundantly : for there was joy in Israel.

COMMENT.—With Abner died the only hope of Saul's house. Ishbosheth was feeble and helpless, and Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, was but twelve years old and a cripple. Abner had already turned the minds of the chiefs of Israel to David, and all was unsettled and doubtful, when two of the captains of the guard of Ishbosheth, not Benjamites, but of the Canaanite remnant, in hope of a reward from David, crept into the royal dwelling at Mahanaim—one of the great irregular houses of cool curtained chambers around courts, so common in the East—under pretence of fetching corn for their soldiers, and basely murdered Ishbosheth as he lay on his

couch taking his noontide sleep. They sped all night, and brought the bleeding head to David ; but, as he told them, if he had killed the Amalekite who slew Saul on the battle-field, how much less should he spare them who had slain their own innocent master by treachery in his sleep? And accordingly he put them both to death.

And now the full time of success was come. The men of Israel had been already stirred towards David, and they felt that he had earned his right to be their king by his seven years' resistance to the Philistines at Hebron, and they remembered that God Himself had marked him out to be their king. The Book of Chronicles tells the numbers that mustered of each tribe,—“mighty men of valour for the war,” “expert in war,” “with all manner of instruments for war,” and, from Issachar especially, men “that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.”

All these bands of brave warriors, fully armed, came marching in, in their thousands, to encamp in that green vale of Hebron that once had not sufficed for the flocks of Abraham and Lot ; all who could keep rank, coming with a perfect heart, bringing their gifts, the gifts of the flock, the herd, the field, and the vineyard, and owning the shepherd hero as their own, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh ; and for the third time he was anointed with the holy oil, and made King of all Israel ; and then ensued a mighty banquet of sacrificial joy.

And let us pause to see the type here traced out. David was anointed once as a boy to designate him for king, once as king of the Jews at Hebron, once as king of all twelve tribes. So the Christ of God was His anointed when born of royal birth ; anointed again with the Holy Ghost, when He was baptized ere commencing His ministry ; anointed again, and crowned with many crowns, when He took to himself His glory in heaven. And He hath made Himself one bone and one flesh with His Church and her members, whom He invites to share with Him in His sacrificial feast, in honour of His victory and His kingdom.

LESSON XCIII.

THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM.

B.C. 1048.—2 SAM. v. *with* 1 CHRON. xi.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land : which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither : thinking, David cannot come in hither.

Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion : the same is the city of David.

And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain.

So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief.

And David dwelt in the castle ; therefore they called it the city of David.

And he built the city round about, even from Millo* round about : and Joab repaired the rest of the city.

So David waxed greater and greater : for the LORD of hosts was with him.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons : and they built David an house.

And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David ; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold.

The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.

And David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines ? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand ? And the LORD said unto David, Go up : for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

And David came to Baal-perazim,† and David smote them there, and said, The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim.

And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them.

And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.‡

And when David inquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up ; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees.

* The tower or citadel.

† The plain of bursts of destruction.

* The giants.

And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going* in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself : for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.

And David did so, as the LORD had commanded him ; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.

COMMENT.—All his life David had gazed at that royal hill which stood out from the table-land of Judah, a wonderful natural fortress built up and moated round by the hand of God Himself. It was a double hill, with a deep ravine like a gash dividing it, and with valleys running along the foot of the steep cliffs so as to render its strength wonderful. Here it was that Melchizedek had reigned as King of Salem, or Peace ; here Isaac had been laid on the wood for sacrifice, and Abraham had named the place JEHOVAH-JIREH, "the Lord will provide ;" and here, both as inspired prophet, wise ruler, and skilful captain, David desired to plant the centre of his power, rendering it at once the sacred city and the point of strength and union for all the tribes. But the Jebusite had held it for centuries past, and even in the full tide of conquest the tribes of Judah and Benjamin had never been able to take it, but had to creep round the base of the hill, with their enemies looking down upon them.

Now, however, in the flush of joy and eagerness, when all the choicest warriors had come to hail him as their king, David proposed to make his coronation feast truly glorious by marching straight from Hebron to capture Jebus. The army willingly heard his call, and they were soon at the foot of the city walls. They took possession of all the lower part of the city, as Joshua had done before them, but the hill of Zion still towered above them, and they were the laughing-stock of the Jebusites within. "Except thou take away the blind and the lame," they cried, "thou shalt not come in."

It is not clear whether they meant that the walls and rocks were so strong that they could be defended by cripples and blind men, whether they actually put these poor creatures on the walls, or whether they put there idols which the Israelites called blind and lame. At any rate, David answered the taunt by promising Abner's vacant post, the chief command of the army,

* Rustling.

to him who should first reach the gutter or watercourse along the top of the walls, and overthrow these defenders of Jebus, the so-called blind and lame. Perhaps he hoped some one would surpass Joab ; but if so he was disappointed, for Joab was the first to climb the wall and win the city. From that time it was the sacred city ; it resumed the holy name made up of Salem and Abraham's prophetic words, and was called Jerusalem, "the vision of peace," and the king himself took up his abode in the fortress on Mount Zion, which came thus to be called the City of David ; and he built walls from Millo, or the tower, enclosing the upper and lower cities, so that Jerusalem became a grand place of security.

There David reigned in honour, becoming more powerful every day. The wealthy Phœnicians on the borders of Asher, in their merchant city of Tyre, sent him gifts, and builders to erect his palace, and cedars from Lebanon for the beams. But the Philistines, who had been at first amazed and stunned by his success, began to recover, and attacked him in the Valley of the Giants, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Here he defeated them with such a burst of destruction that the place was called by a name in allusion to it. The same enemies came again to the same spot, and this time David, on inquiring of the Lord, was desired to refrain from the onset until he should hear a rustling in the tops of the trees. Obeying in faith, his victory and subsequent pursuit so entirely broke the Philistine strength, that they never again became a conquering power such as to endanger Israel.

[So the true Jerusalem, the City on the heavenly Zion, is won by the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, with His faithful ones, who have borne the long peril and danger with Him, and, when He hath put all things under his feet, shall reign with Him for ever and ever.]

LESSON XCIV.

THE SIN OF UZZA.

B.C. 1047.—1 CHRON. xiii. 1—14.

And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader.

And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us :

And let us bring again the ark of our God to us : for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul.

And all the congregation said that they would do so : for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.

So David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim.

And David went up, and all Israel, to Baalah, that is, to Kirjath-jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up thence the ark of God the LORD, that dwelleth between the cherubims, whose name is called on it.

And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab : and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart.

And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.

And when they came unto the threshing-floor of Chidon, * Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark : for the oxen stumbled.

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him because he put his hand to the ark : and there he died before God.

And David was displeased, † because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzza : wherefore that place is called Perez-uzza ‡ to this day.

And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me ?

So David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.

And the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months. And the LORD blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.

COMMENT.—David had always longed above all to see the Sanctuary again established—"to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His temple." So, as soon as he had won and strengthened the city of Jerusalem, he consulted with the chiefs of the tribes about placing the Ark of the Covenant there, and rendering it the place where God should set His name, the great

* The stroke.

† Grieved.

‡ The breaking forth of Uzza.

place of meeting for religious worship for all the tribes. Accordingly messages were sent to all the priests and Levites dispersed through all the tribes to assemble and escort the Ark from Kirjath-jearim, the forest village, where it had been hidden ever since it came back from the Philistines.

“Lo, we heard of the same at Ephratah,
And found it in the wood.”

The people collected in great numbers, and the joy and gladness were great, the minstrel king leading the songs and the music; but it may be that there was haste and irreverence in this day of triumph. It is in the time of exultation that we are apt to take least heed to small rules, and to forget caution and respect. The rule had been clear in the journeyings in the wilderness that the Ark of the Covenant should only be touched by the priests. They were to lift it, and put the staves into the rings, so that it could be carried by the Kohathites without touching it. But this had been neglected or forgotten, and the Ark had been placed in a new cart drawn by oxen, just as the Philistines had sent it home, except that it was driven by Uzza and Ahio, sons or grandsons of the Levite in whose house it had been about seventy years. No doubt they had become familiar with the sight of it, and lost their awe, for when the oxen stumbled and the Ark slipped, Uzza laid hold of it to steady it, and evidently without due honour. Priests were around, so that there was no necessity, and he, though a Levite, had no right to lay a rude hand on it, as though it were a mere chest of shittim wood. Therefore, to check the growing irreverence, the procession, just before so joyous, was suddenly checked in horror and dismay. Presumptuous Uzza lay smitten to death on the threshing-floor of Chidon, or “the stroke;” Nachon, or “the striking!” Then David, in grief and dismay, fearing that his whole proceeding was displeasing to God, placed the Ark for the time in the house of Obed-edom, the nearest Kohathite Levite to be found, who is called the Gittite because his city was Gath Rimmon, and there it remained; and while it was reverently treated, a blessing came with it. Truly those who are bred up among sacred things have need to take care that they deal not lightly with them.

LESSON XCV.

THE ARK BROUGHT TO MOUNT ZION.

B.C. 1047.—2 SAM. vi. *with* 1 CHRON. xv. xvi.

And it was told King David, saying, The LORD hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.

And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.

Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites : for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it.

And David assembled the children of Aaron, and the Levites :

And said unto them, Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites : sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it.

For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach* upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.

So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel.

And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD.

And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy.

So David and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the house of Obed-edom with joy.

And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.

And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers : David also had upon him an ephod of linen.

Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps.

And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing : and she despised him in her heart.

So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that

* Brake forth in anger.

David had pitched for it : and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God.

And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD.

And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine.

Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself.

And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel : therefore will I play before the LORD.

And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight : and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.

Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

COMMENT.—The house of Obed-edom was blessed while the Ark was present in it, and therefore David inferred that with it he should bring a blessing to Jerusalem. He set up a tent for the reception of the Ark upon Mount Zion. This is the reason that Mount Zion is spoken of in the Psalms as a sacred place whence protection and holiness proceed. And thus grew up the prophecies that became fulfilled when, in an upper room in the city upon Mount Zion, the Sacrament of the Supper of the Lord was instituted, and again the descent of the Giver of all goodness, God the Holy Ghost, took place.

Mark David's carefulness. He had learnt that none but Levites should bear the Ark, and he collected them and the priests, and when the Ark had been carried forth six paces, he paused that sacrifices might be offered. Then, wearing a white robe like the priests, and clad with the ephod or scarf, he led the procession in a solemn measured dance, singing with the whole of the musical Levites the beautiful Psalms he had composed for the occasion, and which are, every line of them, full of prophecy of the time when the Son of God should ascend to His throne in the heavens. There is the 68th, beginning with the old verse that was always sung at the raising of the Ark in the march in the wilderness :—

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered :
Let them also that hate him flee before him.

Then rejoicing in the hill which above all hills was to be chosen for the presence of the Lord, and triumphing in the former glorious victory won by the Ark when it returned alone from its captivity, bringing gifts with it. These words were only truly realized when Christ broke the power of Death, ascended on high, led His captivity captive, and received the chosen gift of His sacred ministry from among men :—

Why leap ye, ye high hills?
This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in :
Yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever.
The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels :
The LORD is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.
Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive :
Thou hast received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also,
That the LORD God might dwell among them.

The procession is further described :—

The singers went before,
The players on instruments followed after ;
Among them were the damsels playing with timbrels.
Bless ye God in the congregations,
Even the LORD, from the fountain of Israel.
There is little Benjamin with their ruler,
The princes of Judah, and their council,
The princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.

Benjamin being called the ruler because Mount Zion was in his tribe. The 15th Psalm is another of these, describing the purity of him who could climb to the Sanctuary :—

LORD, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle?
Or who shall rest on Thy holy hill?

And the 24th Psalm, taking up the same strain of praise, goes on to call on the gates of Zion to open to receive the Ark which betokened the presence of God, in words that truly were a foretaste of the angelic songs that should welcome the ascended Lord into heaven after His battle and victory.

The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof ;
The world, and they that dwell therein.
For he hath founded it upon the sea,
And established it upon the floods.
Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD?
Or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart ;
Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.
He shall receive the blessing from the LORD,
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
This is the generation of them that seek him,
That seek thy face, O Jacob.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates ;
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory ?
The LORD strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates ;
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors ;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory ?
The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Most glorious day, when the Ark, with the Mercy-seat, found a home, and Jerusalem became God's sanctuary and holy city. All the people rejoiced too; for David feasted them and blessed them in the name of the Lord.

Yet the day ended in grief and anger through a proud woman. The daughter of Saul, the queen-wife, had her father's contempt of priests and religious services. It grieved her to see David share in the rites; not like a king of the nations conducting the sacrifice, as her father had done, but merely joining in the solemn dance and song as a former member of the Schools of the Prophets. She reproached him with proud scorn, and his answer was full of displeasure. He cared not how he humbled himself for God's honour. And Michal's punishment for this outbreak of the pride of her family was that she was childless. No son of hers should carry on the blood of Saul in the house of David; she was to have no share in the ancestry of the Son of David.

LESSON .XCVI.

THE BEGINNING OF PSALMODY.

B.C. 1047.—I CHRON. xvi. 4—9, 29—43.

And David appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record,* and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel :

Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jeiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obed-edom : and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps ; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals ;

Benaiah also and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God.

Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren.

Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name,
Make known his deeds among the people.
Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him,
Talk ye of all his wondrous works.

* * * * *

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name ;
Bring an offering, and come before him :
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
Fear before him, all the earth :
The world also shall be stable, that it be not moved.
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice :
And let men say among the nations, The LORD reigneth.
Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof :
Let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein.
Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD,
Because he cometh to judge the earth.
O give thanks unto the LORD ; for he is good ;
For his mercy endureth for ever.
And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation,
And gather us together,
And deliver us from the heathen,
That we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise.
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for ever and ever.

And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD.

So he left there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark continually, as every day's work required :

* To keep God's great works in mind.

And Obed-edom with their brethren, threescore and eight ; Obed-edom also the son of Jeduthun and Hosah to be porters :

And Zadok the priest, and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon,

To offer burnt offerings unto the LORD upon the altar of the burnt offering continually morning and evening, and to do according to all that is written in the law of the LORD, which he commanded Israel ;

And with them Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest that were chosen, who were expressed by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever ;

And with them Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those that should make a sound, and with musical instruments of God. And the sons of Jeduthun were porters.

And all the people departed every man to his house : and David returned to bless his house.

COMMENT.—When David had placed the Ark at Mount Zion, he arranged, evidently by his inspiration as a prophet as well as his authority as a king, a ministry such as had probably had its beginning in the colleges of the prophets formed by Samuel, and which has never had an end, nor ever will, for praise shall endure for evermore. The old Tabernacle, which had been at Nob, had since been transferred to Gibeon—at what time we do not know ; and David left it there with a branch of the priesthood to continue the daily sacrifice. At the head was Zadok, the representative of the line of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, which was coming into note again after having in some manner lost the high priesthood to the younger line of Ithamar, to which Eli belonged.

But at the tent on Mount Zion, before the Ark, David placed bands of the Levites—chiefly the Kohathites, to whom Samuel had belonged, and whose gifts of poetry and music had been cultivated in his college at Ramah,—and appointed them to sing morning and evening to the praise of the Lord, such sacred hymns as already existed, and to the number of which the holy king was continually adding, as God the Holy Ghost, “who spake by the prophets,” breathed into him yearnings for the coming Messiah—utterances that would be those of that Christ Himself—and voices of praise and prayer that would render the Psalms that he thus first commenced the “prayer-book of the Church” for ever—not suiting the Israelite king alone, but the whole body of Christians and each Christian separately.

This Psalm which he first delivered to them, as given in the Book

of Chronicles, consists of portions of several as they stand in the Book of Psalms, and he probably added to and divided it afterwards. Among the Levites here mentioned are Asaph, who was the writer of several Psalms; Heman, who wrote one; and Jeduthun, to whom several are inscribed, meaning probably that they were to be set to music by him, and sung by his division of Levites. Many of the Psalms have titles which are believed to be the names of their tunes, or of the instruments to which they were adapted, the chief being a small hand harp, the like of which it is said was preserved and used in the cities where the Babylonish captivity had taken place.

LESSON XCVII.

THE PROMISE TO DAVID.

B.C. 1047.—2 SAM. vii. 1—17.

And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies;

That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.

And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.

And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying,

Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheeppcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as before-time,

And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men,* and with the stripes of the children of men:

But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

COMMENT.—At this time David, in his 37th year, had triumphed over all the trials of his youth. Saul was dead, the Philistines were conquered, the Ark was on Mount Zion, and Israel had become a united kingdom, with a beautiful and strong capital. David was at rest; and the workmen and materials sent to him by Hiram, king of Tyre, had enabled him to build for himself a palace worthy of a settled kingdom. Then he felt—what it would be well for all of us to feel—that the honour of God should come before his own. He could not bear to find himself in the most costly dwelling Israel had yet seen, while the Ark of God was only within a curtained tent. He therefore designed to build a costly temple for the glory of God, and he told his scheme to Nathan the prophet, who had probably been his companion in Samuel's School of the Prophets. Nathan heartily approved when first he heard of it; but that night the Lord spake unto him, with a message for David, a message of disappointment as regarded himself. In the first place He reminds David that up to this time a tent had sufficed, and He had never commanded any of the previous great men of Israel to build Him a solid and lasting temple, and He now forbade David to do so. We find afterwards, from what David said to Solomon, that this was because he, like them, had been a warrior, a man of blood (1 Kings viii. 8), and God required that His Temple should be built by a man of peace; with hands unstained by violence; even as

* Punish him like other men.

it is the Prince of Peace who hath built up the Church of God. But David's pure and loving intention, wholly to the glory of God, met with God's approval. He took the will as the deed; and it is a great comfort to know that it will always be so, if the will be a real will. And at the same time He softened the disappointment by the assurance that what David himself might not do, his peaceful son should accomplish after his death; nay, the promise went much further. The kingdom of David should not come to an end like that of Saul, but the crown should always continue in his family. If they fell into sin, they should be punished like other men, but not cast away like the house of Saul, nor cut off wholly like the royal families of the later kingdom of Samaria. Nay, in this promise came the declaration of the eternal kingdom that could belong to God alone; therefore it assured David that the Messiah should spring from him. No one since Judah had received that promise: now it came to David, in that assurance of the everlasting kingdom of his seed—the very word used to Abraham, and likewise in the saying quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews (i. 5), "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son." Or as the 89th Psalm, written in much later times, when the sin had come and the chastening too, thus repeats the promise and enhances the prophecy:—

Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst,
I have laid help upon one that is mighty;
I have exalted one chosen out of the people.
I have found David my servant;
With my holy oil have I anointed him:
With whom my hand shall be established:
Mine arm also shall strengthen him.
The enemy shall not exact upon him;
Nor the son of wickedness afflict him.
And I will beat down his foes before his face,
And plague them that hate him.
But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him:
And in my name shall his horn be exalted.
I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.
He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock
of my salvation.
Also I will make him my firstborn,
Higher than the kings of the earth.
My mercy will I keep for him for evermore,
And my covenant shall stand fast with him.
His seed also will I make to endure for ever,

And his throne as the days of heaven.
If his children forsake my law,
And walk not in my judgments;
If they break my statutes,
And keep not my commandments;
Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him,
Nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.
My covenant will I not break,
Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.
Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.
His seed shall endure for ever,
And his throne as the sun before me.
It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness
in heaven.

LESSON XCVIII.

DAVID'S VICTORIES.

B.C. 1047.—2 SAM. vii. 18—29; 1 CHRON. xviii.

Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O LORD God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?

And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O LORD God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O LORD God?

And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, LORD God, knowest thy servant.

For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.

Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?

For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever; and thou LORD, art become their God.

And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.

And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the

God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee.

For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: * therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.

And now, O LORD God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant:

Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O LORD God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.

* * * * *

Now after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines.

And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.

And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates.

And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadarezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men.

Then David put garrisons † in Syria-damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

Them also king David dedicated unto the LORD, with the silver and the gold that he brought from all these nations; from Edom, and from Moab, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines, and from Amalek.

Moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah slew of the Edomites in the valley of Salt eighteen thousand.

And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David's servants. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

So David reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice among all his people.

COMMENT.—How did David take the rejection of his favourite scheme? Instead of being grieved to anger, he was overpowered with joy and thankfulness. He went to the ark, and uttered a most fervent and beautiful thanksgiving, full of faith and joy for what was long after called "the sure mercies of David." Here we see that sweetness of love and heart-whole faith, devoid of all selfishness, which helps us to understand why David was the man after God's own heart.

But David's time of triumph was only a brief rest. His enemies were many, but now that Israel was a compact kingdom instead of a mere confederation of tribes, the neighbouring nations became jealous, tried their strength, and were each in turn overthrown.

* Raise up thy family.

VOL. II.

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† Soldiers in their fortresses.

The Philistines were first subdued, then the Moabites and Syrians to the north-west, who were divided into the kingdoms of Zobah and Damascus—beautiful Damascus upon its rivers—whence Abraham's faithful Eliezer had come. He took possession of their fortresses, and obtained tribute and gifts from them—in especial shields covered with plates of gold and silver, which he dedicated unto the Lord. This spread his borders to the Euphrates; thus fulfilling the promise to Abraham at the covenant made by the sign of the burning lamp—"Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. xv. 18). As surely was the threat of Balaam fulfilled, that the sceptre of Judah should "smite all the corners of Moab" (Num. xxiii. 17). The Edomites, descendants of Esau, in their hills of Seir, likewise attacked David, and were defeated by Abishai in the valley of Salt—namely, that around the Dead Sea; and thus was it brought about that the elder served the younger, as foretold by Isaac.

In the 60th Psalm we have the war-song of Israel when going out to the battle. From it we gather that the Edomites must have used them cruelly—no doubt while the wars of Saul were going on; but now God had given them a banner beneath which to fight, and would deliver their foes into the hand of His beloved. This is perhaps a play on the name of David, which means "beloved." David speaks of his possession of the land of Canaan from the hills of Shechem to Succoth, named from Jacob's booths, in the outmost border; from Gilead far beyond Jordan to Manasseh in the heart of the land; Ephraim for strength, Judah as the capital; while the deep cauldron-like vale of Moab, steaming with the vapours of the Dead Sea, was like a bath for his feet, and Edom should be beneath his tread, Philistia receive him with triumph. For it was God who enabled David and his brave men to do valiantly! Some have thought that this Psalm was sung by the troops going out to battle, and the 108th, which repeats many of the verses, on their return; but the best informed think the latter was composed in much later times, after the captivity in Babylon, as an encouragement to the returned Jews.

O God, thou hast cast us off,
Thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased;
O turn thyself to us again.

Thou hast made the earth to tremble ;
Thou hast broken it : heal the branches thereof ; for it shaketh.
Thou hast showed thy people hard things :
Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.
Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee,
That it may be displayed because of the truth.
That thy beloved may be delivered :
Save with thy right hand, and hear me.
God hath spoken in his holiness ;
I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem,
And mete out the valley of Succoth.
Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine :
Ephraim also is the strength of mine head ;
Judah is my lawgiver ;
Moab is my washpot ;
Over Edom will I cast out my shoe :
Philistia, triumph thou because of me.
Who will bring me into the strong city ?
Who will lead me into Edom ?
Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off ?
And thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies ?
Give us help from trouble :
For vain is the help of man.
Through God we shall do valiantly :
For he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

LESSON XCIX.

DAVID'S KINDNESS TO MEPHIBOSHETH.

2 SAMUEL ix.

And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake ?

And there was of the house of Saul, a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba ? And he said, Thy servant is he.

And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him ? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

And the king said unto him, Where is he ? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.

Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.

Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was

come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant !

And David said unto him, Fear not : for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father : and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am ?

Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.

Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat : but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.

And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.

So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem : for he did eat continually at the king's table ; and was lame on both his feet.

COMMENT.—The time to which this chapter refers is not clear. Most likely it was as soon as David was established at Jerusalem that he sought for the remnants of the family of the fallen monarch. Most princes who have been raised on the fall of a former royal line, have made such a search in cruel jealousy and suspicion, but there was no room for such a thought in David's generous heart. What he was thinking of was the oath he had made to Jonathan when they wept so bitterly together at the boundary stone of Gibeah, and of Saul's entreaty in that softened moment in the valley of Hachilah. He sought out a retainer of the family of Saul, one Ziba, a prosperous man, who seems to have been a time-server, and who freely answered him that there still remained that child of Jonathan's who had been crippled by a fall from his nurse's arms in the course of the disastrous flight beyond Jordan after the battle of Gilboa. He was the only true heir, and had apparently been hidden away on the death of Ishbosheth, by friends who did not know how generous and merciful David was, in the house of Machir, a great chief of the half-tribe of Manasseh, near Mahanaim, the seat of Ishbosheth's short-lived kingdom. Whether Ziba betrayed him or meant to do him a service does not appear, but the poor cripple came in evident dread and terror before the king, and tried by his intense humility to convince

him that he had no longings for his grandfather's throne. He must have been amazed when David received him as the son of his beloved friend, and restored to him all the hereditary possessions of the family of Kish on the hills of Benjamin, but as his infirmity would have hindered him from enjoying the life of a chief-tain on the hills, David made him a home at his own house and gave him a seat at his own table, appointing Ziba as his steward to manage his property. Mephibosheth had one son who continued the family of Saul. No doubt it was for the sake of the faithful Jonathan that the portion of the house descended from him was not cut off. There were two other sons of Saul, but their mother was Rizpah, only an inferior wife, and they did not rightly share the inheritance.

LESSON C.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE GIBEONITES.

2 SAMUEL xxi. 1—14.

Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.

And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah).

Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?

And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you.

And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel.

Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them.

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholahite:

And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.

And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa:

And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged.

And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated* for the land.

COMMENT.—The chapter which is here given comes later in the Book of Samuel, but it is in a sort of appendix closing David's reign, and it is likely that what it relates happened near the beginning of his power. David in his generous kindness meant to spare the family of his predecessor, but the Divine justice, which declares that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children to the third and fourth generation, would not permit them to go unscathed. A famine was sent on the land for three years, and when the cause was asked by the appointed means, through the Urim and Thummim, the Divine reply was that it was on account of an unpunished slaughter of the Gibeonites under Saul.

It should be recollected that the Gibeonites were those Amorites to whom Joshua and his elders had solemnly sworn an oath of protection (Book III. Lesson XI.), and had made them servants to the priests, so that they were under the guardianship of the nation. Saul had probably slain them at the time of his destruction of their masters the priests, and had further, it seems, hunted and persecuted them through all the corners of the land, no doubt hating to have

* Prayer prevailed to have the famine removed.

foreigners among his subjects, and, in his ungodly self-will, condemning the oath of so many years ago. He could not have made a wholesale slaughter without the aid of many Israelites, and therefore the famine was no unjust punishment to them. Besides, it is a rule of God's providence that a national sin is visited by national suffering, unless the nation frees itself by yielding up the guilty person. And the law of old had declared that "blood it defileth the land : and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it" (Num. xxxv. 33). Saul himself was past the reach of human justice, and David offered the survivors of the tribe whatever compensation or atonement they chose to demand, that the sentence might be removed. They would accept no gifts, no land ; they demanded, as revengers of blood, the death of seven of Saul's family, to be delivered to them to be hung at Saul's own home at Gibeah ! The whole affair was taken out of David's hands, as it were, by this direct interposition of God. He could only keep his word. He saved Mephibosheth, the child of the innocent Jonathan, who had kept himself pure from his father's sins, but he yielded up the two sons that Rizpah had borne to Saul, and likewise five grandsons of the king. They seem to have been the children of Merab, Saul's eldest daughter, and of Adriel ; but our version has the name Michal, David's own childless wife, and some suppose that her sister might have died and she have taken the care of them. At any rate, the terrible lesson of the doom of broken faith and savage cruelty was taught by the seven corpses hanging on the trees, beneath which Saul's gigantic form had sat in state with his sceptre spear beside him.

Two laws were here set aside, not by David, but by God, the Law-giver Himself, namely, that which declared that the children should not be put to death for the father's sin (Deut. xxiv. 16), and that which forbade that a corpse should hang all night on a tree (Deut. xxi. 22). But that doom brought out that wonderful strength and tenderness of a woman's heart. "Love is stronger than death." Rizpah, the beloved of Saul's old age, and the cause of Abner's dispute with Ishbosheth, must have been already remarkable. When her sons were hanged, at the opening of barley harvest, the feast of the Pass-over, she took sackcloth and spread it on the rock, and there night

and day she kept her desolate watch, through all the heats of summer and the long dreadful nights, resolute in her love and courage, driving away the hovering raven and vulture, and the more terrible wolf and jackal, that would have preyed on those ghastly mouldering forms still so dear and sacred to her. Such was her watch till the beginning of the rains, and then David heard, was touched by her heroism, and gave honourable burial to the seven, at the same time as he brought the remains of Saul and his sons from Jabesh-gilead to their father's tomb at Gibeah.

LESSON CI.

DAVID'S SIN.

2 SAM. xi. (abridged.)

B.C. 1034.—*The most severe of David's wars was with the Ammonites, who, like Moab, were descendants of Lot. On the death of Nahash, king of Ammon, who had been kind to him in his wanderings, David had sent ambassadors to compliment Hanun on his accession, but the new king listened to foolish counsellors, who persuaded him that the message was only a pretext for coming to spy out the land, and the friendly messengers were treated with the utmost indignity, their flowing robes cut short off, and their beards, the pride of the heart of an Oriental, shaven on one side of their faces. Word was sent to David, before whom the disgraced men were ashamed to show themselves, and he bade them remain at Jericho until their beards should be grown again. The Ammonites, perceiving that their insult must lead to war, hired two bodies of Syrians to assist them, but they were defeated in one great battle by the brothers Joab and Abishai, and when further reinforcements of Syrians were brought up from beyond the Euphrates, David himself crossed the Jordan, totally defeated them, reduced them to pay tribute, and deprived the Ammonites of their help. These ancient wars were almost always conducted in single campaigns in the spring of each year, both parties returning to their cities for the rainy season, and when the season came round again, the attack upon the Ammonites was resumed.*

And it came to pass, after the go forth to battle, that David s

¹ at the time when kings
wants with him, and all

Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers and took her.

And it came to pass that David wrote a letter to Joab.

And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were.

And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war.

And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king,

And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall?

Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? * did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

So the messenger went, and came and shewed David all that Joab had sent him for.

And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate.

And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him.

And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.

And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

COMMENT.—Unlike his usual habits, David remained at home at Jerusalem, while Joab was sent forth, with the thirty great mighty men who commanded the army, to devastate Ammon, and lay siege to the capital, Rabbah, or Rabbath Ammon. It seemed as if it

* Gideon, *i.e.* Jerubbaal. "Bosheth," or "Shame," is used to stand for Baal.

was this indolence that first led David into that temptation into which he fell, dimming the glory that had hitherto been so bright, and changing the whole tenor of his life. There was one error into which Saul had apparently not fallen, yet which led David astray. Eastern monarchs, even in the days of Abraham, had regarded it as their privilege to collect in their harems all the fair women who pleased their taste; but this custom of multiplying wives had been forbidden to the future king of Israel (Deut. xvii. 17). Saul does not appear to have done so, since he certainly had only four sons besides those two of Rizpah, whom he probably took in his later years after the death of the wife of his youth.

But David, when deserted by Michal, had begun by multiplying wives. He had two before his reign at Hebron, and to these he had added four more during the seven years at Hebron, one of whom was the daughter of the petty king of Geshur—very possibly accepted to cement an alliance; but this disobedience had begun to taint his mind, and break down the barriers that guard against temptation. While lingering in his palace, instead of fighting the battles of the Lord, he arose from his midday sleep on a couch spread on the flat roof of his house, and gazed down into the courts and gardens of the city below. By that look he made another step in evil. He did not turn his eyes from the beautiful woman he saw bathing in the garden, and thus he fell into the sin of coveting his neighbour's wife, the first step to the actual taking her, and thus breaking the seventh commandment. She was one whom he was doubly bound to respect, as her husband and father were both among his thirty mighty men, and were absent, enduring hardships as good soldiers before the walls of Rabbah. Uriah was a Hittite by descent, but had heartily joined himself to the people of the Lord, and was a man of peculiar honour and faithfulness. Yet David, when yielded up as it were to the power of evil, did not scruple to send private letters to Joab, bidding him cause this brave man to be deserted in the midst of the enemy. Probably he was only thinking how "kings like those of the nations" would have seized the wife, and openly slain the husband without letting him die a soldier's death. An evil spirit had seized him, and the deadly secret he shared with Joab did not grieve him. He went on outwardly the same pious and just so

nly another wife was added

to his harem, another son to the already numerous troop with various mothers, and he never bethought him of the stain on his hitherto spotless fame, nor of the two broken commandments. "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord," and as yet he knew it not.

LESSON CII.

NATHAN'S REBUKE TO DAVID.

B.C. 1033.—2 SAM. xii. 1—15.

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring* man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

And I gave thee thy master's house, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house;† because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour.

* Travelling.

† There should be continual bloodshed in his family.

For thou didst it secretly : but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die.

Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

And Nathan departed unto his house.

COMMENT.—Temptation befalls all ; sin ensnares many, but there is no one whom God leaves to go on in sin without warning. The turning point is how that warning is received. So the prophet Nathan was sent to David, and came before him as if bringing to his notice a case of cruel oppression from a rich man to a poor one. It was a tale to touch the heart of the king, who had begun life as a shepherd boy, and had felt the love for the little ewe lamb here so touchingly described. Nay, it would rouse in him the high, pure, generous feelings that had been his when he fought with the lion and bear to rescue his lamb. David heard with hot indignation of the cruel loss of the poor man, and broke forth with his sentence of death to the oppressor, and of fourfold compensation to the sufferer. He little expected the fearless answer, "Thou art the man!" He had uttered his own sentence. Bathsheba was the one ewe lamb ; Uriah was the poor man ; David himself was the oppressor, and he could never restore the lamb fourfold, for he had slain Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon. The secret that he thought lay between him and Joab was proclaimed before him by the prophet. Even as Samuel had begun his message to Saul with reminding him that God had anointed him, so Nathan reminds David in each case, to show him that he was God's appointed servant, answerable to Him, and therefore under His sentence, which Nathan proceeded to deliver, that the sword should never depart from his house, and that evil should rise up from among his own family—the bold, violent, haughty sons, who were growing up round him, half-brothers only, jealous, and aiming at the throne.

But it was not the fear of a terrible death in a home war by his children's hands that overcame David ; nor was it anger against the man who spake truth to him and threatened him. It was the sudden sense of his own guilt—no excuses, like Saul ; he

uttered no word of entreaty to be spared the punishment. He simply said, "I have sinned against the Lord." The Lord whom he loved so much, who had given him such blessings for the present, such promises for the future! His commandments had been transgressed! That was enough for David. He could think of nothing but that displeasure!

God saw his entire repentance, and moved Nathan to answer: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." As in the 32nd Psalm—

"I said, I will confess my sins unto the LORD,
And so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

David's earthly life was forfeit as a murderer, in fact, and in the sight of God his soul's life had been in the utmost jeopardy; but his sin was put away, blotted out beforehand by that same Blood that blots out ours if our repentance be only as true and deep, and if, like him, we will confess our sins unto the Lord. Therefore he should not die eternally, nor should his own blood be shed in requital for Uriah's; but "as he had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," the life of the babe newly born to him of the beautiful Bathsheba should be taken instead of his own. Nor was the earlier part of the sentence removed. Evil was still to arise against him out of his own family; and though his line should never be entirely destroyed, there should always be bloodshed and violence among them. Truly he had given occasion to wicked men to blaspheme. The falls of the good delight the enemies of God, who cry out that these men are no better than themselves; and even down to our own day this sin of David's is lightly talked of, and gives occasion for blasphemy! Yet his contrition is one of the most blessed examples in the whole Scripture, and has been and still is the means of the most constant benefit to the Church and to every repenting sinner. For it is the truest and sweetest of repentance, accepting the punishment, and grieving solely for the offence to God.

Penitence that loves the hand that chastises, as did David and Moses, is the true and worthy penitence. How different from Cain or from Saul!

LESSON CIII.*

DAVID'S PRAYER OF CONTRITION.

B.C. 1033.—PSALM li.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness :
According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my
transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions :

And my sin is ever before me.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in
thy sight :

That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest,

And be clear when thou judgest.

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ;

And in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts :

And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean :

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness ;

That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Hide thy face from my sins,

And blot out all mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God ;

And renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence ;

And take not thy holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,

And uphold me with thy free spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways ;

And sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation :

And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

O LORD, open thou my lips ;

And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

For thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give it :

Thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit :

A broken and a contrite † heart; O God, thou wilt not despise.

* Not for the younger ones.

† Worn down with grief.

Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion :
Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering :
Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

The rock is smitten, and to future years
Flows ever fresh the tide of holy tears,
And holy music, whispering peace,
Till time and sin together cease.

COMMENT.—The rock of David's hardened heart had been broken, and thenceforth his lamentation has been the pattern and the voice of all who, like him, would repent. This prayer of his, composed, as the title in the Bible tells us, just after Nathan's rebuke has aided the repentance and guided the sorrows of thousands and millions ever since. His sorrow could find no relief but in this hymn-like prayer; and God the Holy Ghost so guided his words, that what he spake of himself should apply to all who long to own their sin.

Observe, the Psalm is in four divisions, containing—first, his confession; second, his entreaty; third, his vow of gratitude; fourth, his concluding prayer: and in each division the short middle verse marks the point.

And in his confession how remarkable it is that, though the injury to his neighbour had been so great, the thought of it is swallowed up in the sense of what the sin was against the God whose anointed servant he was, and whose perfect justice he owns. Do we always think enough about sinning against God, when, as we say, we do nobody any harm? David owns his entire wickedness—his birth-sin—in words that have gone on as the expression of the corruption under which we all were born.

Then comes the entreaty for restoration, beginning with the heart; and then alluding to the ceremonies of the Law by which a leper was admitted back to God's presence (Lev. xiv. 4), when he was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice on a bunch of hyssop, and washed again and again in pure water. David knew that his sin was a leprosy that only God could wash away, and thus he prays for the clean heart, and that the Holy Spirit, who had come to him at his anointing, might not be taken from him. How much more should a Christian pray, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me"? Nay, in his depth of grief, he can still pray for the joy of salvation to be

restored, and his free, liberal, open hearted spirit, in bondage to no sin, to return !

So he can hope to go on drawing other sinners back to God ; he who dares to pray to be delivered even from the guilt of Uriah's blood, and to have his lips opened once more to that worthy praise which he knows to be more precious than the sacrifices of bullocks and goats. He himself offers the great example of that most blessed truth, that our best offering is a broken and contrite heart ; contrite, that is, worn, rubbed down as it were, by the misery it has undergone.

And lastly he turns to his prayer for his Jerusalem which he was building ; meaning, perhaps, to beg that his crime might not bring evil on it ; a prayer which Christians may apply to their Jerusalem, the Church of the Living God, joining with David in the promise of grateful thank-offerings at His altar. Most precious, most sweet of Psalms. On how many death-beds has it been the last utterance?—how many sinners has it brought home ? Thanks unto the God who thus brought good out of evil.

LESSON CIV.

THE DEATH OF DAVID'S CHILD.

B.C. 1033.—2 SAM. xii. 15—25.

And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

David therefore besought God for the child ; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.

And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth : but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead : for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice : how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead ?

But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead : therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead ? And they said, He is dead.

Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed^d himself, and

* Queen Margaret of Scotland ; Henry V.

changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped : then he came to his own house ; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.

Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive ; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.

And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept : for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon : * and the LORD loved him.

And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet ; and he called his name Jedidiah, † because of the LORD.

COMMENT.—The sentence of punishment in this world which Nathan had spoken began to be fulfilled by the sickness of the young child of Bathsheba. David, who loved his children most tenderly, grieved exceedingly, and hoped, by his own prayer and humiliation, to win the life of the innocent child from the God who had hitherto “granted him his heart’s desire, and fulfilled all his mind.” But, alas! a change had come since those happy days. God is merciful, but He is just; and though David was pardoned, and still beloved and loving, yet chastening was good for him. Suffer he must for his sin, for “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb. xii. 6). Without the continual suffering under the sentence, who knows whether David might not have fallen back into the sins he had repented of, or been led away by the temptations of a conquering Eastern monarch? So, in spite of his tears, the child was taken, and the first stroke had fallen. But his counsellors were amazed that, after the child’s death, he ceased his mourning and humiliation. They did not understand that though, while life lasted, he tried whether prayer and fasting would avail to win mercy for the little one, yet since its death was God’s will, he was resolved to submit cheerfully, and not by word or sign to show any complaint of what he knew came from a Father’s hand, and was well deserved. He did not say, like Cain, “My punishment is greater than I can bear,” but he fixed his thought on that time

* Peaceful.

† Beloved of the Lord.

when he should meet his child once more ; and when we remember that it was David who sang (Psalm xvi.)—

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth :
My flesh also shall rest in hope.
For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell ;
Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
Thou wilt shew me the path of life :
In thy presence is fulness of joy ;
At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore—

we cannot doubt that he looked to the home of the blessed beyond the grave. These are the clearest expressions of such hope in the earlier part of the Bible, and the Psalm, as St. Peter points out, is plain prophecy of our Lord's resurrection (Acts ii. 31).

An earthly consolation was given to David in the birth of another child of Bathsheba, a child who was marked out from the first as the peaceful son who should build the Temple and continue the promise. David had named him Solomon, "the peaceful ;" and Jedidiah, or "beloved of the Lord," was a surname given him by God Himself, who sent by the hand of Nathan, and thus marked him out.

LESSON CV.

EXPLOITS OF DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN.

B.C. 1033.—2 SAM. xii. 26—31 ; xxi. 15—17 ; 1 CHRON. xx. 4—8.

And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city.

And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters.

Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it : lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.

And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it.

And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones : and it was set on David's head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance.

And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln : and thus did he unto all the cities of

the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint.

And Ishbi-benob,* which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David.

But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel.

And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines; at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Sippai, that was of the children of the giant: and they were subdued.

And there was war again with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver's beam.

And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant.

But when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, slew him.

These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

COMMENT.—Whether what we are told in this lesson happened in the interval before Solomon's birth is not certain, since it is not unlikely that the sacred writer carried on the history to the token of David's forgiveness before going back to finish the account of the Ammonite war. There is also reason to think, from expressions in the 32nd and other Psalms, which belong to his time of penitence, that David's grief had resulted in a heavy sickness, which apparently weakened and made an old man of him; and at any rate Joab conducted the siege of Rabbah-Ammon by himself. It lasted a long time, but at length he took the lower city, or, as it was called, the City of Waters, from the fine stream Maiel, or Upper Jabbok, which surrounded it. Travellers who find their way to the ruins of Ammon, as it is now called, understand the force of Joab's term when they come upon the bright waters full of fish. The citadel still remained, and Joab, who always had a great care for the honour of his king, sent to summon him to the final assault, lest he should miss the glory of being the conqueror. The fortress was

* Inhabitant of the high place.

accordingly attacked and taken, and Hanun's crown, of extraordinary weight and beauty, was set on David's head. Some think this is referred to in the 21st Psalm: "Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head." The insult to David's ambassadors seems to have been visited on the inhabitants of Rabbah in a manner that we can only think of as ferocious, even when we remember that the Ammonites were a wicked race, who had perpetrated many cruelties; unless, as is possible, the words merely imply that they were condemned to service in the brick-kiln, or with saws and harrows. The verses that follow are in the Book of Samuel, in the appendix, and the four last are in the First Book of Chronicles, immediately after the siege of Rabbah. It does not seem unlikely that the events belong to this period, when the Philistines may have attempted a fresh rising, and David's strength, once so mighty, had begun to fail, so that he was in great danger when fighting with a huge brother of Goliath, whom he had slain so easily in his youth. He was saved by Abishai, his nephew, who was always noted for his fond love and faithfulness to him, and who now swore in his eager affection, with the other mighty men, that their beloved king should never again personally risk himself in battle, lest he should "quench the light of Israel."

Do not we gain a lesson here—that if we have fought with one giant sin in youth, and subdued it, still there remains a terrible brood of its brethren which may come against us in age? And then woe to us if we be not prepared to meet them!

Yet again, when we turn to contemplate David as the type of our victorious King subduing Satan, we learn that even as He has conquered, so shall His faithful ones conquer in His strength.

LESSON CVI.

THE DEATH OF AMNON.

2 SAM. xiii. 23—39.

B.C. 1030.—*Five years passed since the crime of David, and not without honour and glory. He may have hoped that his prayers and tears had won the remission of the sentence of constant bloodshed in his house, and foes rising out of his own family, at least during his own life. But his many marriages, and the jealousies among his proud and lawless sons, were bringing about the evil. Abigail's son had probably died, for at the head of the family stood Amnon and Absalom, the mother of the latter being daughter of a petty king to the north-east of Bashan. A cruel insult was offered by Amnon to Tamar, the sister of Absalom by the same mother, and, after long brooding over it, and finding that his father would not avenge it, Absalom thus took the law into his own hands.*

And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheep-shearers in Baal-hazor, which is beside Ephraim : and Absalom invited all the king's sons.

And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers ; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant.

And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him : howbeit he would not go, but blessed him.

Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee ?

But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon ; then kill him, fear not : have not I commanded you ? be courageous, and be valiant.

And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled.

And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left.

Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth ; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent.

And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's

sons ; for Amnon only is dead : for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined.

Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead : for Amnon only is dead.

But Absalom fled. And the young man that kept the watch lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came much people by the way of the hill side behind him.

And Jonadab said unto the king, Behold, the king's sons come : as thy servant said, so it is.

And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of speaking, that, behold, the king's sons came, and lifted up their voice and wept : and the king also and all his servants wept very sore.

But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day.

So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years.

And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom : for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.

COMMENT.—Absalom had an estate of his own in Mount Ephraim, and thither, at a great sheep-shearing feast, such as we have seen Nabal holding in Carmel, he invited all the Court. David objected, on account of the great entertainment that would be needful for so many ; but Absalom made a special entreaty for Amnon, and when David asked why he was so anxious for his presence, supposing perhaps that this indicated suspicion and a remembrance of their enmity, he pressed for the attendance of all his brothers. David seems to have had altogether nineteen sons, six born at Hebron and thirteen at Jerusalem. Nathan, who is given in the genealogy by St. Luke as an ancestor of our blessed Lord, is thought to have been a son of Bathsheba, as well as Solomon. These would have been too young for the expedition ; but many of the princes joined Absalom's treacherous feast, where, in the height of the festivity, the stroke of vengeance fell, and Amnon was murdered before the eyes of his brothers !

The tidings came at first that the whole company had been slain ; but in the midst of David's anguish, his nephew Jonadab, son of his brother Shimeah, Absalom's favourite companion, assured him that no one was hurt but Amnon, on whom Absalom had for two years intended to be revenged. Even thus the tidings were sad enough : the doom had fallen ; and when the young men came hurrying back in haste, grief, and terror, there was bitter weeping of them and of their father, thus reminded again of his sin.

Absalom meantime had fled to the home of his grandfather, Talmi, king of Geshur, at the foot of Mount Hermon. There, no doubt, he was encouraged to form designs upon the throne, and his proud, godless temper was fostered by living among the heathen, far from all rites of worship and from his father's example. But he must have been the most able of all David's elder sons—with remarkable power of concealing his purpose till the moment for action; and moreover he was a youth of splendid beauty, so that his father delighted in him, and loved him in spite of his faults, and longed earnestly to bring him home once more, excusing his revenge as caused by his own slackness to punish Amnon, and yearning for the absent son with all his tenderness of heart.

LESSON CVII.

THE RECALL OF ABSALOM.

B.C. 1027.—2 SAM. xiv. 1—24.

Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom.

And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead:

And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him. So Joab put the words in her mouth.

And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king.

And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead.

And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him.

And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal* which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth.

* Embers, or lighted wood.

And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee.

And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, I pray thee, let the king remember the LORD thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth.

Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on.

And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty,* in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished.

For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect† any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.

Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid.

For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man that would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God.

Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the LORD thy God will be with thee.

Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak.

And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words into the mouth of thine handmaid:

To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth.

And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again.

And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, To day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant.

So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem.

And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face.

COMMENT.—The bold and politic Joab perceived how David longed after his exiled son, and probably regarding Absalom as the

Convicts himself of unkindness. † Make any difference. * Rank or station.

natural heir of the kingdom, he arranged a plan for making the king believe that the hearts of all the people of the kingdom were longing for the recall of the youth, who had only struck to revenge his insulted sister. For this purpose Joab found a woman at the village of Tekoah, and instructed her in a story like enough to the king's own trouble to touch his feelings. She was to appear as a widow in mourning garments, and not anointed with the olive oil that was always the token of festivity and gladness, and to call herself the mother of only two sons, one of whom had struck the other to death in a chance quarrel. The relations, as revengers of blood, she said, insisted on her delivering up her remaining child to be put to death, and she appealed to the king to interfere, and prevent them from quenching the only light left to her hearth.* David's pity was moved, and he readily promised that her son should be spared; whereupon she came to the point. Did not the king, by his readiness to pardon the man who had slain his brother in a brawl, convict himself of unkindness towards his own son—"his banished"?

She even brought the case still nearer home. We all are sinners, with our lives forfeit before God. He is no respecter of persons, and deals with all mankind alike. Yet He devises means to fetch home to His favour those who are banished from it. Perhaps the words were meant as an implied hint to David that he himself could not be hard on others. He had been banished from God's favour for many a long month, and at last it was God Himself who had deigned to devise means for fetching him home. But unconsciously the saying reaches far further, and brings before us those eternal counsels of the Almighty and All Merciful, when, to fetch home the banished race of man, the Son of God took the nature of man; and reminds us how even now the Good Shepherd is ever devising means to bring home His banished and lost sheep.

Probably Joab meant David to take this as a voice coming from the people, but the king saw through the manœuvre, and made the woman confess who had sent her, which she did, complimenting him on his wisdom as equalling that of an angel. However, the object was so far attained. He was convinced that the nation in

* A coal in Scripture is never used to mean mineral coal, but always burning, or charred, wood.

general thought that Absalom ought to be pardoned, and he therefore consented to send Joab on a mission to bring the young man back from Geshur; but, with all his yearning love towards him, his sense of justice made him forbid the murderer to appear before him. So Absalom returned indeed to his own house, but was shut out from his father's presence.

LESSON CVIII.

ABSALOM'S TREASON.

B.C. 1027-24.—2 SAM. xiv. 25—xv. 6.

But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.

And when he polled* his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it :) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight.

And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance.

So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face.

Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come.

Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire.

Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?

And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.

So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and

* Cut his hair.

it was so, that when any man that had a controversy* came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel.

And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.

Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!

And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him.

And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

COMMENT.—All the fierce and ambitious passions within Absalom had grown during his exile in the heathen land of Geshur, where his mother's kindred would probably fill him with expectations of the throne, and inflame his discontent at the subjection in which he was kept. He had likewise grown in the perfection of manly beauty. Absalom was under a Nazarite vow, made in Geshur, and therefore wore long streaming hair. The Nazarites were permitted to poll, or cut this, at intervals, provided they burnt it on the altar and offered sacrifices with it. Absalom's hair is reckoned to have weighed six pounds! Meanwhile he became impatient of his exclusion from the king's presence, and the manner in which he forced Joab to come to him, and drove him to intercede with the king, shows all the savage overbearingness of his nature. It is likely that though he was reconciled to the king, he found that the succession to the throne was intended for his little brother Solomon, who had been Divinely pointed out as the heir of the promise (when God sent to call him His beloved), and, like Ishmael and Esau, he rebelled against the decree. He began to collect horses and chariots. The use of these was forbidden to the Israelite mountaineer (Deut. xvii. 16—20), and Absalom and his brothers had hitherto ridden mules. He likewise drew together a band of attendants, as if for mere show and vanity, but really with a treasonable intention. As appears afterwards, he set up a pillar in honour of himself, either because he was impatient at being long childless, or because he had lost his children. And, with secret designs of evil, he daily placed himself beneath the arched gateway of the city, the favourite place of resort, and as the people

* Dispute.

came through on their way to the palace with their causes to lay before the king, he spoke to them affably, and pretended to lament that his father did not attend to matters of justice as formerly, and had appointed no one in his stead to hear such cases ; sighing at having no power himself to act. It is likely that this is what David refers to in the 69th Psalm, when he says—

For thy sake I have borne reproach ;
Shame hath covered my face.
I am become a stranger unto my brethren,
And an alien unto my mother's children.
For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up ;
And the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon
me.
When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting,
That was to my reproach.
I made sackcloth also my garment ;
And I became a proverb to them.
They that sit in the gate speak against me ;
And I was the song of the drunkards.

From this we gather that the enemies of the Lord were already blaspheming and scoffing at the depth of David's penitence, so that the very drunkards made songs of derision at his humiliation. Moreover, as we shall find, David was collecting materials for the Temple to be built by Solomon, and this preparation was almost certain to be pointed out by Absalom as a grievance. An old feeble man, beset by priests, prophets, and women, heaping up treasures for a scheme of his own, fretting over a past failing, unheeding the duties of his station. Such did the son represent his great, holy, tender father !

[And already the likeness of the afflicted Saviour was moulding itself in David, whose words in future times should come to the disciples' minds, when the Son of David purified the Temple, and they bethought them of "the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up."—John ii. 17.]

LESSON CIX.

ABSALOM'S REBELLION.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xv. 7—29.

And it came to pass that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron.

For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.

And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron.

But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.

And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing.

And Absalom sent for Ahithophel* the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.

And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off.†

And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.

Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile.

Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee.

And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

* The Brother of Folly.

† A house outside the walls.

And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him.

And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over : the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron,* and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God : and they set down the ark of God ; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city.

And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city : if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation :

But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.

The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer ? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar.

See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me.

Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem : and they tarried there.

COMMENT.—When the time seemed to Absalom ripe for his schemes, he asked permission of his unsuspecting father to go and pay his Nazarite vow at Hebron, which for Abraham's sake was then a sacred place, and where he had been born. It is said to have been "after forty years," and there is a question whether this be an error in the writing for four years, or whether the forty can be reckoned from David's first anointing by Samuel at Bethlehem in 1065. Two hundred men of Jerusalem he invited to his feast, and they went in ignorance of his design ; but he had warned the men "whose hearts he had stolen" by his blandishments, to rise and join him when they should hear the sound of the trumpet at Hebron ; and he seems also to have before taken counsel with one of David's chief advisers, namely, Ahithophel, of the city of Giloh, in the hill country of Judah. His son was Eliam, or Ammiel, who was the father of Bathsheba ; unless indeed her father were another Eliam, not the son of Ahithophel. Some have thought that it was Bathsheba's disgrace and the murder of Uriah that embittered Ahithophel against the king, but it hardly seems likely that such a time-server as Ahithophel evidently was would join a rebellion so perilous to his granddaughter's children. It is plain, however,

* The Dark.

that his desertion was a very great surprise to David, since he mourns over it in two Psalms :—

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted,
Which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.
PSALM xli. 9.

Again—

For it was not an enemy that reproached me ;
Then I could have borne it :
Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me ;
Then I would have hid myself from him.
But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.
We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God
in company.

PSALM lv. 12—14.

In both of these wondrously foretelling, even in minute detail, the treachery of Judas.

Such numbers flocked round at Absalom's summons, drawn by his machinations, that when the tidings came to Jerusalem David had no time to raise an equal force. He had no doubt that there were many faithful hearts throughout Israel ; but Absalom was on his march, and no warriors were at hand but the Philistine body-guard, whom he had brought with him from Ziklag, and probably converted to his faith. They were the Cherethites, a word thought to come from the name Cretans ; the Pelethites, or runners ; and the Gittites, from Gath ; but brave as they were, David had not numbers to risk a battle, and as the walls of Jerusalem were not yet finished, he thought that to await the rebels within them would only bring bloodshed and destruction on his beloved city. So, with all his wives and young children, he repaired first to his house outside the city, where all the faithful gathered round him, and he had time to show his noble unselfishness by the commands he gave. He advised Ittai of Gath, as a stranger and not his subject, to go back with his Philistines, and serve the new king ; but Ittai loved him far too earnestly not to cast in his lot with him, and held to him, like Ruth, as indeed did all the noble guard, taking their wives and children with them. Nor would David allow the priests to bear the ark with him ; Jerusalem was its rightful home, and he would not take it away. He was religious and reverent, but not superstitious, and he knew that God would be with him even without the ark, and that if God were against

him the ark could do nothing for him. He further agreed with the two priests, Zadok and Abiathar, that their two sons, sacred persons able to pass in and out easily, but active young men, should carry him intelligence, for which he would wait on the road to the fords of Jordan, through the wilderness of Judea. So all the faithful, and David among them, descended to the ravine where flows the brook Kidron, or "The Dark," by the very path, perhaps, by which, after more than a thousand years, the Son of David should descend, to be betrayed in the garden of Gethsemane, by His own familiar friend, into the hands of His enemies.

LESSON CX.

DAVID ON MOUNT OLIVET.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xv. 30—xvi. 14.

And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.

And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.

And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head:

Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me:

But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests.

Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear.

So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the

servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits,* and a bottle† of wine.

And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink.

And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To-day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.

Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king.

And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came.

And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial:

The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.

Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.

And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him.

It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.

And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.

COMMENT.—There are few descriptions more touching in the whole world than that of the great conqueror king, in his old age, driven from the city his victorious arms had won for his people by his own ungrateful son and subjects, weeping as he went, and with all those with him bearing the tokens of mourning, the head

* Dates.

† Large skin.

wrapped in the mantle and strewn with dust, and the feet bare. But the hill he mounted was Olivet, which slopes up from the Kedron brook which he had just passed—the same hill where the Anointed Son of David wept in like manner over Jerusalem, but, unlike David, had no sin of His own for which to weep. On the crown of the hill, whence the Saviour should one day ascend into heaven, David, before turning away out of sight of the fair city that he loved so well, bent prostrate on the ground in prayer. He had just been told of the defection of Ahithophel, tidings that had dismayed and grieved him exceedingly ; but he was here encouraged by the arrival of Hushai, his friend and counsellor, and apparently reckoned as next in prudence to Ahithophel ; but he seems to have been an old man and useless as a warrior, so that David represented that, though he would be an encumbrance in the retreat and wandering, he could do as great service by offering himself to Absalom, doing his best to prevent Ahithophel's clever plans from being adopted, and sending tidings of them through the two young priests. It was a stratagem, no doubt, and does not agree with our Christian notions of honour ; but this shows how the standard even of the good has been raised since the coming of the Greater than David.

Another pang caused by the sense of ingratitude fell on the sorrowful king. Ziba, Mephibosheth's steward, came up from Gibeah with a present of cakes of pressed raisins and dates, with wine and asses—all most welcome to the fugitives hastily driven from home ; but he brought with them a story that Mephibosheth was waiting at Jerusalem in the hope of being made king in his grandfather's room—a cruel and false accusation, for poor lame Mephibosheth had been only prevented from accompanying his benefactor in his flight by Ziba's own contrivance to deprive him of his ass. But it was another shock, to make David feel himself forsaken ; and, stung with grief and anger, he granted all Saul's land away to the treacherous Ziba. Again, as he passed down the eastern slope of Olivet, at Bahurim (near Bethany), he was on Benjamite ground, and a kinsman of Saul's family, Shimei by name, came out and ran along the side of the hill, on the opposite side of the long ravine through which the Kedron rushes to the Jordan, throwing stones and earth at the fugitive king, and reproaching and cursing him savagely as a man of blood, declaring that the deaths of the sons of Saul (probably the seven slain in

expiation) were returned on him, and reviling him so furiously, that Abishai, always warm in the love and defence of his uncle, would have rushed across the valley and silenced the reviler for ever with his sword, had not David withheld him, and meekly endured the abuse as not wonderful from a Benjamite—well knowing that even Shimei's shameful mockery was part of the chastening sent upon him by the Lord, and therefore submitting so meekly and sweetly, broken-hearted as he was, as to foreshow the holy silence of Him "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

LESSON CXI.

*MORNING AND EVENING HYMNS OF DAVID'S REFRESHMENT
AT BAHURIM.*

B.C. 1023.—PSALMS iii. and iv.

THE MORNING HYMN.

LORD, how are they increased that trouble me!
Many are they that rise up against me.
Many there be which say of my soul,
There is no help for him in God.

But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me;
My glory, and the lifter up of mine head.
I cried unto the LORD with my voice,
And he heard me out of his holy hill.

I laid me down and slept;
I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people,
That have set themselves against me round about.

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God:
For thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone;
Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.
Salvation belongeth unto the LORD:
Thy blessing is upon thy people.

* Not for the younger ones.

THE EVENING HYMN.

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness :
Thou hast enlarged* me when I was in distress ;
Have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.
O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame ?
How long will ye love vanity,† and seek after leasing ?‡

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself:
The LORD will hear when I call unto him.
Stand in awe, and sin not :
Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And put your trust in the LORD.
There be many that say, Who will shew us any good ?
LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

Thou hast put gladness in my heart,
More than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.
I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep :
For thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

COMMENT.—The last lesson ended with the halt at Bahurim, after the sad progress down Mount Olivet. There the fugitives rested and refreshed themselves while waiting for Hushai's intelligence from Jerusalem. What the king's refreshment was we see here. It was the same refreshment as cheered him when the Ziphites betrayed him, and when his followers turned against him for the disaster at Ziklag. It is the best refreshment any of us can have : not of course to frame inspired poetry, but to turn to the God who comforted David, and in the very words he has left us, as not only soothing, but saving. When we turn over the next page, we shall see what his enemies were planning against him on that very night, when in the ravine among the rocks of the Judean wilderness, among the host of frightened women and trembling children, he laid him down in peace to sleep, not trusting to Abishai's love, or Ittai's fidelity, or the spears of the Philistine guard, but to the Lord who made him to dwell in safety. It is very likely that as of old he had sung psalms to train and instruct his wild outlaws in the Engedi cave, so now again he took up his harp and led these morning and evening hymns to guide the trembling people to their

* Set me free.

† Folly.

‡ Lying.

only true hope, reminding them that though the ark was gone back the Lord could still hear out of His holy hill, and that their salvation was in Him, for He could shatter the cheek-bone—namely, break the strength of the enemy.

The evening hymn is more of an address to his followers, though it begins with prayer and thanksgiving. It exhorts them not to lament over his glory, his love of the Temple, and his repentance, as if it were his shame, which according to the vain empty words and falsehoods of his enemies had brought this trouble on him, for he has still a sure confidence that he is God's chosen, and will still be heard by Him; and he therefore bids his followers stand in awe, watching the course of God's chastening, and not be led into sin by impatience and faint-heartedness, but to think deeply, examine their own hearts in silence, and submit. If they were cut off from the daily sacrifice, they could offer the better sacrifice of righteousness and trust.

Many of the fugitives were in despair, and said, "Who will show us any good?"—What hope is left for us? But the true hope is here still, as David repeats the priestly blessing, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." Nay, he owns himself happier and more at peace than his foes could be, rejoicing in the corn and wine that he had left behind. Thus fearlessly he lays him down to sleep in full confidence.

"A quiet conscience in the breast
Is more than peace—is more than rest."

And though David was under punishment, he knew himself forgiven, and so could be at peace—the peace that passeth all understanding.

These two verses : the morning,

I laid me down and slept;
I awaked, for the LORD sustained me;

and

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep;
For thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety,

are a part of our Christian inheritance that we should do well to take to ourselves, by learning and repeating morning and evening.

They are both of daily and homely application, and further point to the death and resurrection of the Saviour first, and of His people after Him ; for in Him they shall safely sleep in their graves, and safely waken at the great morning of the Eternal Day.

LESSON CXII.

THE COUNSEL OF AHITHOPHEL.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xvi. 15—20 ; xvii. 1—14, 23.

And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him.

And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king.

And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend?

And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay ; but whom the LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide.

And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence.

Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do.

And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night :

And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid : and all the people that are with him shall flee ; and I will smite the king only :

And I will bring back all the people unto thee : the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned : so all the people shall be in peace.

And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel.

Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith.

And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner : shall we do after his saying? if not ; speak thou.

And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time.

For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed* in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field : and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people.

* Angry.

Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom.

And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men.

Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person.

So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one.

Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there.

And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and harged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

COMMENT.—The great need for David was to gain time. Joab seems to have gone to collect the loyal Israelites to come to his aid, and so probably had Benaiah and the rest of the mighty men; but while he was “weary and weak-handed,” with only the Philistine guard to protect him, and encumbered with a great troop of women and children, his danger was great in case of a sudden attack. This the crafty Ahithophel perceived, and urged upon Absalom to let him go forth with a chosen body of men, and fall upon the fugitives in their confused and exhausted state. In the meantime, however, Hushai had arrived, and obtained the favour of the vain, hot-headed Absalom by the smoothest of flatteries and compliments; and in answer to Ahithophel’s advice he made a wordy speech, representing that David and his friends were valiant and skilful warriors, and that probably the king would not sleep in the midst of the fugitives, but in some cave or safe place; and that if he were not taken, but fell upon the rebels while they were disordered by plundering his camp, they would be dispersed and disheartened. So he rather counseled waiting to overpower him with the hosts of men from one end of Israel to the other, whom he declared to be about

to rise in behalf of the son, using the utmost stretch of language to express the ease and greatness of the victory. Ahithophel, with some remnant of shame, had not advised the son to go forth to battle with the father; Hushai pretends to think that much would turn on Absalom's going forth in person; and the young man, puffed up by flattery, decided to follow the counsel of the flatterer. So it was that while David was laying himself down in peace to take his rest, trusting himself entirely unto his God, the Lord was so overruling the hearts and schemes of the wicked men, his enemies, that they chose the plan which left him in safety on that perilous night at Bahurim, and which led to their own ruin. Ahithophel, indeed, when he saw that his advice was not taken, perceived that Absalom's cause could not thrive, and could not brook to await the return of the kingly friend he had betrayed and wronged, but went to his own house, arranged his affairs, and put an end to his own life. He is the only suicide except Saul mentioned in the Old Testament, and his fate, as well as his treachery, resembled that of Judas Iscariot. Indeed, as has already been said, the Psalms in which David bewails Ahithophel's treason were guided to become prophecies of that of Judas, as, indeed, our Lord Himself showed when he quoted "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" (John xiii. 18). St. Peter likewise quoted the 109th Psalm, which also denounces the rebels, as his authority for the appointment of a successor to the traitor: "Let his days be few, and another take his office."

These Psalms, the 55th and 109th, as well as some others, denounce most awful curses upon the wicked, the rebels and traitors; but we must view them not as expressions of personal hatred and ill-will on the part of the holy David against any particular persons, but as the prophecies and denunciations against those who commit sin, put into his mouth by God Himself, the Judge of all.

LESSON CXIII.

DAVID AT MAHANAIM.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xvii. 15—xviii. 5.

Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Abithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled.

Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him.

Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by En-rogel,* for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench† went and told them; and they went and told king David.

Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down.

And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known.

And when Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.

And it came to pass, after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David; and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you.

Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan.

Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.

And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, and his mother was Abigail, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother.

So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead.

And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim,

Brought beds, and basons,‡ and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse,

And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for

* The fuller's well.

† Maid-servant.

‡ Kettles.

the people that were with him, to eat : for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also.

But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth : for if we flee away, they will not care for us ; neither if half of us die, will they care for us ; but now thou art worth ten thousand of us : therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city.

And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.

And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom.

COMMENT.—Hushai could communicate with the priests without suspicion, and, as before arranged, their two sons were to be sent to carry information of the advice Ahithophel had given, and to advise David to place the Jordan between himself and his enemies. They had not returned into Jerusalem with their fathers, but were hidden by a well outside the walls, which is still shown. Thither a maid-servant of the high priest's was sent to tell them the message they were to carry to David, and they hurried off by night—it must have been the second night of the flight—and carried the warning to Bahurim. All rose up in the night, and so perfect was the order kept by David and Abishai, that by morning light all his followers were safe across the Jordan, and not a straggler had been left behind. However, a boy in Bahurim had seen the two young priests ; Absalom was told, and sent out to seize them, and they were only saved by hiding in a well sunk in the court-yard, while the woman of the house said “they were gone over the water,” by which the pursuers understood they were gone over the river Jordan with David. It was one of those subterfuges—the truth in words, though not in intention—which are doubtful weapons, and should never be used except, as in this case, to save life. Another adherent of Absalom, who is here mentioned, was his cousin Amasa, who had joined David at Ziklag, but was apparently jealous of the favour of

the sons of Zeruiah, and was set by Absalom in the place he coveted, the post of Joab.

David's refuge was Mahanaim, the same where Ishbosheth had fled from him nearly thirty years before, and where Jacob had seen his vision of the hosts of angels. It would seem as though the angels still hovered over David there. Not only was he succoured by a more friendly-tempered son of Nahash of Ammon, by the same Machir who had aided Ishbosheth, and by the princely old chieftain Barzillai, who brought him ample supplies of all he could need, while all the faithful flocked to the lion of the tribe of Judah, but a whole flood of inspired prophecy was poured on him. It was as if his perfect submission to his punishment were rewarded by special graces from the Holy Spirit—special revelations of the future; so that he felt that his own sorrows were shadows and forebodings of those sorrows that should save himself and all of us from our sins. More of his Psalms bear the date of this period than any other of his life, and those especially which minutely describe in detail the suffering of our Lord. Above all, we may mention the 22nd Psalm, which seems to have been suggested to him by the sight of a deer, driven to bay by the hunters and dogs on one side, and by the fierce bulls of the Bashan pastures on the other, panting, exhausted, unpitied, torn in all its limbs. He saw first his hunted, persecuted self, and broke out into lamentation and prayer, describing himself in the likeness of the deer, but gradually rising in hope and perception, so that each word became prophetic, and the opening cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" became the very sigh of the Saviour upon the cross.

How long he was at Mahanaim does not appear, but it was long enough to bring together men enough to be numbered by thousands, according to David's discipline, before Absalom came over the river in search of him. The king reviewed the army and appointed the officers, but yielded to their entreaties that he would not himself venture into the battle; only, as he stood in the gate of Mahanaim, watching the ranks pass by, he entreated one captain after another to save the life of his undutiful son. "For my sake deal gently with the young man, even with Absalom."

LESSON CXIV.

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.

E.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xviii. 6—23.

So the people went out into the field against Israel : and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim ;

Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men.

For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country : and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth ; and the mule that was under him went away.

And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak.

And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground ? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle.*

And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son : for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.

Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life : for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me.

Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak.

And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.

And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel : for Joab held back the people.

And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him : and all Israel fled every one to his tent.

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale : for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance : and he called the pillar after his own name : and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies.

* Made thee a captain.

And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day : but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.

Then said Joab to Cushⁱ,* Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushⁱ bowed himself unto Joab, and ran.

Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushⁱ. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?

But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushⁱ.

COMMENT.—The battle between David's loyal subjects and Absalom's party took place near Mahanaim, in a place called the wood of Ephraim, probably from the slaughter Jephthah had there made of the Ephraimites when they interfered with his judgeship (Lesson XXXVII.) God was with David, and indeed there could be little doubt which way the victory would lie when on one side were the mighty men trained and proved in many a battle, and led by three experienced generals, and on the other the hasty levies of a proud, hot-headed youth. "The region where the battle was fought is still covered with such forests, with thick oaks and tangled bushes and thorny creepers growing over rugged rocks and ruinous precipices, down which the rebel army plunged in wild dismay, horses and men crushing each other in remediless ruin. Thus 20,000 men perished in that fatal wood, which 'devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.'" "The strong arms of the trees spread out so near the ground that one cannot walk erect beneath them ; and on a frightened mule, such a head of hair as the vain and wicked son polled every year would certainly become inextricably entangled." The Jewish historian Josephus says it was the king's own mule on which Absalom was riding, as another insult to his father. He had been met in his flight by several of David's servants, who would not strike him because of that earnest command of his father ; but the curse upon every one that hangeth upon a tree was brought on him by God's own decree, through the hair he had nourished in vanity or in hypocrisy. His hair seems to have been caught, and his neck and head wedged into the branch, so that he was helpless when the mule went from under him. The man who first saw him in this plight told Joab. The fierce,

* An Ethiopian.

hard-tempered captain of the host, to whom Absalom had shown wanton ingratitude, and who deemed it far best for his uncle that the rebel should not be brought to his fatherly forgiveness, blamed the man for not having killed him at once ; and finding that the king's charge prevented him, went himself, and thrust three darts with his own hand through his cousin's heart as he hung powerless. The body was taken down, thrown into a pit, and every man threw a stone on it, after the Eastern way of expressing abhorrence. Such was Absalom's real memorial instead of the pillar he had raised for himself. However, Joab was anxious about the manner in which David should hear the tidings, and no doubt hoping that he would think Absalom had perished by chance in the fight, he tried to detain the eager, swift-footed young priest Ahimaaz, and entrusted the message to Cush, a black slave, whom he trusted to tell the story in a more courtly manner.

LESSON CXV.

DAVID'S MOURNING.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xviii. 24—xix. 8.

And David sat between the two gates : and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld a man running alone.

And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near.

And the watchman saw another man running : and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.

And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings.

And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.

And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.

And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

And, behold, Cushie came; and Cushie said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.

And the king said unto Cushie, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushie answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom.

And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son.

And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.

But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!

And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons, and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives,

In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.

Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now.

Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent.

COMMENT.⁷—Here we have the scene before us perfectly described—the grey-headed king sitting sad and anxious beneath the deep gateway, heeding his own state far less than that of the rebellious son who has driven him forth; the watchman on the wall above; the shout proclaiming that a solitary figure is running across the plain; then another in the further distance; then that it is the running of young Ahimaaz. Then the young priest reaches the gate, with a shout “All is well,” and falls down in reverence before the king with

the good tidings of the victory. But David scarce heeds in his anxiety for his son. Ahimaaz's heart fails him ; he cannot tell the father, and he makes an evasive answer. The black man comes with his tidings of the victory, and to the repeated inquiry answers with abject forms of respect, but conveys the fact in the words, " May all the king's enemies be as that young man." Then all the king's firmness gives way ; with all his depth and warmth of heart he breaks into the lament, " O my son Absalom ! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son ! " and, unable to face the returning army, he staggers up the steps to the chamber over the gateway, and, lying flat on the ground, still his cry, " O Absalom, my son, my son ! " rings out in agony of grief, not like that for the innocent babe whom he hopes to meet again, but for one cut off in his sins, without one word to seek pardon from his father or his God ! The sobs and moans and the bitter cry are a sad welcome for the warriors who have won the battle ; every one feels himself reproached by it, and they steal into Mahanaim like men after a defeat instead of a victory. Then Joab, always rough and domineering towards the finer, tenderer spirit he cannot understand and half despises, strides up to that chamber of sorrow, and harshly rouses his uncle with fierce reproaches for his grief for the rebel and ingratitude to his friends, threatening that if he do not exert himself to thank his faithful soldiers, every one would desert him before night. Then the broken-hearted father, awakened by these words, unkind as they are, to a sense of his office as king, and rising up, forces back his tears, commands his countenance, and seats himself once more at the gateway, to give his warriors the thanks and praise they look for from the glorious old king they have fought for.

Every character is as distinct and clear before us as if all had happened yesterday. And is there any exhortation, any pleading that can so show a son or daughter the pain and grief they can inflict, as that piteous cry, " O Absalom, my son ! my son ! "

LESSON CXVI.

DAVID'S RESTORATION.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xix. 9—30.

And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines ; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom.

And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back ?

And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house ? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house.

Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh : wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king ?

And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh ? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab.

And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man ; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants.

So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan.

And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David.

And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him ; and they went over Jordan before the king.

And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan ;

And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart.

For thy servant doth know that I have sinned : therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king.

But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed ?

And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me ? shall there any man be put to

death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel?

Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.

And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace.

And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth?

And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame.

And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes.

For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?

And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land.

And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.

COMMENT.—David, who had been chosen at first by the goodwill of all his people, would not return without their general consent, and among those who had fought against him there was a reluctance, more of shame than of dislike, to making the first move. Yet, instead of marching in with the victorious Cherethites and Pelethites to bear down all opposition, he sent messages to the tribes to assure them of his pardon. To Judah especially, as his own tribe and the beginning of his kingdom, he sent through the priests to remind them that they were one with him, his brethren, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; implying that so far from being angry with them, he only wished to return on their invitation. To Amasa, whose desertion had probably been caused by jealousy of his cousin Joab, he sent a kinsman's kind greeting and the promise of the appointment to be captain of the host. Perhaps he meant to make this Joab's punishment for the death of Absalom; or, as Joab had always hitherto seemed to prefer his uncle's interest to his own, he may have trusted to his perceiving the necessity of winning over so powerful a personage. At any rate the hearts of all the tribe of Judah were turned as one man,

† they came in a body to the sacred old camping-place at

Gilgal, where Joshua's memorial stones stood, in the river and on the bank, and again rolled away the reproach by inviting the king to his home again. It was now almost a triumphal procession. The Jordan was crossed—not, as before, in the night, in haste and anxiety, but a ferry boat, brought perhaps from the lake of Genesaret, brought over the king's household. It was evidently so unusual a way of crossing, that it was here recorded.

Among these men of Judah came cringing the same Shimei who had so insulted David in his adversity—the type of the scoffers around the Cross—and with him a thousand Benjamites, raised by Ziba, Mephibosheth's treacherous steward. He durst not present himself before the king till he had passed the river, and then fell down before him imploring his pardon, and taking credit to himself for being the first, not only of his own tribe of Benjamin, but of all the tribes of Joseph, to welcome the king. Abishai, indignant at his baseness, would have slain him where he grovelled, but David withheld the sword, saying that not a man should be put to death that day, and granted Shimei his life; but it is plain that he continued a dangerous and disaffected person.

There was another Benjamite now coming to meet David, riding on his ass, with shaggy beard and squalid dress, as one who had mourned all the time of the usurpation. To him the king spoke gently, as having been wounded by his desertion: "Why wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?" Then came the explanation. Mephibosheth, in the confusion of the flight, had been deprived of his ass, without which he could not move, and left behind to the fury of the lawless rebels, to whom his royal blood might have marked him as a victim; while Ziba represented him as a traitor, and ingratiated himself with David by gifts from his master's own estates. Yet Mephibosheth, with all his father's generous love, made no complaint; he thought only of David's kindness to himself. And David was in a difficulty. In his first hasty wrath he had given away all the lands of Saul to Ziba: the man had really done good service, and there he stood, with his fifteen sons, at the head of the thousand Benjamites. Only Judah had as yet returned, and to offend Ziba might be dangerous; so David bade the old arrangement to be returned to. Mephibosheth should receive a share of the fruits, while Ziba held the land. But here the really

... he showed itself: "Let him take all, forasmuch as my
... and as come again in peace." This was real love; love of
... and not of his gifts. And his return is the likeness
... of our true King, who shall discern between the
... and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him
... Him not.

LESSON CXVII.*

THE DISPUTE OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xix. 31—xx. 2.

And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan.

Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man.

And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.

And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?

I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?

Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward.

Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee.

And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee.

And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place.

Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel.

* This and the ensuing chapter, though not difficult in themselves, could be omitted in reading with children whose memories it might not be desirable to tax with too many
25.

And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan?

And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us : wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift?

And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye : why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite : and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse : every man to his tents, O Israel.

So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri : but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem.

COMMENT.—There was another of David's faithful ones still, who loved him for himself alone, the great old Gileadite chief Barzillai, who from the fertile pastures of Rogelim, the high land beyond Jordan, had freely supported the fugitives all the time they were at Mahanaim, and who now, with all his numerous armed servants (for no doubt he lived in those plains much as Abraham had lived of old), came to escort the king on his return. David invited him to Jerusalem, there to requite his loyalty ; but the grand old man made a touching and dignified reply, showing how little all the honours and the pleasures that the Court could offer could do for him at his great age, though offering his son or his grandson, Chimham, to the king's service. Years after (Jer. xli. 17) we find the habitations of Chimham spoken of at Bethlehem, and it is argued from them that David in his gratitude granted to the Gileadite part of his own hereditary domain at Bethlehem.

This took place at Gilgal at the time of the crossing of the river ; but David's dangers were not yet over. A jealousy and dislike were growing up between the tribe of Judah on the one hand and the tribes of Israel on the other. It had probably begun during the seven years when David reigned over Judah alone ; and the fact that Judah had outstripped the other tribes in offering their submission, and acted alone in fetching him home.

now caused a bitter quarrel and dispute—the one tribe representing that the king belonged to themselves ; the others, that as king he belonged to the whole commonwealth, and ought not to have been reinstated without the consent of all. Evil always follows where people will not forget themselves and their rights. The split between Judah and Israel became the ruin of their greatness in the end, and at the moment it broke up and destroyed the gladness of David's return ; for a Benjamite—"man of folly"—named Sheba, following the wolfish, turbulent nature of his tribe, blew a trumpet and carried the whole body of Israelites off from David into a fresh state of rebellion.

LESSON CXVIII.

THE MURDER OF AMASA.

B.C. 1023.—2 SAM. xx. 3—23.

And David came unto his house at Jerusalem.

Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present.

So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah : but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him.

And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom : take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us.

And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men : and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them. And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof ; and as he went forth it fell out.

And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother ? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him.

But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand : so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again ; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.

And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that is for David, let him go after Joab.

And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still.

When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Beth-maachah, and all the Berites : and they were gathered together, and went also after him.

And they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench : and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall to throw it down.

Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear ; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.

And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab ? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear.

Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel : and so they ended the matter.

I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel : thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel : why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD ?

And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy.

The matter is not so : but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David : deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall.

Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

Now Joab was over all the host of Israel.

COMMENT.—If Amasa had rebelled out of discontent at his uncle's not promoting him, he showed in the moment of need that he was unequal to the charge he desired ; for he failed in collecting the army to oppose the rebel Sheba, and David was obliged to send out Abishai to assist him with the Philistine guard. At Gibeon, where the old tabernacle then stood, and where Joab had had his encounter with Abner, they met Amasa ; and here, too, Joab, whom David had not named to the command, seems to have suddenly appeared, and while greeting Amasa with a kinsman's kiss, treacherously stabbed him, as he had done to Abner, and then, as a matter of course, took the command of the army, sure of their affection and confidence, and presuming upon it that

David would have no more power to punish him for this than for the previous murder. Indeed, some think that David feared to bring him to justice for the death of Amasa because of the guilty secret that he held. It is these terrible deeds that show us what is the real tendency of those little jealousies and rivalries we are apt to think so little of.

Joab then pursued Sheba to the north of Israel, and besieged him in Abel, a city near Lake Merom; but while he was battering the walls, a woman looked out from them, and reproached him for attacking the place without having called on the inhabitants to surrender; and when he explained that he wished no ill to the city, only to the rebel Sheba whom it sheltered, she carried the tidings to the elders of the city, and the head of the rebel was presently thrown to him over the wall.

So ended the last spark of Absalom's rebellion, and the jealousy between Judah and Israel was extinguished for a time, while the king reigned again at Jerusalem, with all his great captains around him, his army divided by tens, hundreds, and thousands, Joab over all, in the place his valour had won and his treacherous murder had kept; then three great officers, of whom Abishai was one; another rank beneath, thirty in number, to which Benaiah belonged, and who seem to have been generals, each with ten officers under him, making three hundred mighty men, besides the Philistine guard. The books of Samuel and of Chronicles record the names of these brave men, whose descendants no doubt loved to see them there. Two names are there with very different associations—Asahel, the brave youth who was spared by death from his brother's ambition and crime, and Uriah the Hittite.

LESSON CXIX.

DAVID'S CHOICE.

ABOUT B.C. 1020.—2 SAM. xxiv. 1—18 *and* 1 CHRON. xxi. 1—18
(collated).

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.

And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.

And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?

Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel.

And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Arzer, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward Jazer:

Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi,* and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon,

And came to the stronghold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beer-sheba.

So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword.

But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

When David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

* The lower part of the new moon; probably the land where it was worshipped.

Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things ; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee

Either three years' famine ; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee ; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.

And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait : * let me fall now into the hand of the LORD ; for very great are his mercies : but let me not fall into the hand of man.

So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel : and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it : and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough : stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.

And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered ? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed ; but as for these sheep, what have they done ? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house ; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.

COMMENT.—There is still one more error of the holy David's life to be told. The Book of Chronicles has entirely passed over both his great sin and Absalom's rebellion ; but as the events above narrated are connected with the foundation of the Temple, it dwells on them somewhat closely. The one book says that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel ; the other that Satan moved David. We gather from this that when a nation is sinful and needs chastisement, God permits Satan to tempt their rulers to actions that lead to their punishment. The ruler can, of course, resist the temptation—it is no excuse for him ; but we are clearly shown the need of constant prayer, that God will guide the hearts of those in power.

That Israel deserved punishment there can be no doubt when

* Difficulty.

we look back to their factious, petulant, and jealous behaviour during the rebellion of Absalom and Sheba. And next comes the question, What was David's error in the matter? Vain-glory in the numbers of his subjects probably moved him at first; but as God Himself had twice commanded a numbering, it is not at first easy to see the wilfulness of the action, till we look back to the original law in the 30th chapter of Exodus:—

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them.

This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs :) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD.

Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD.

The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

Here we see that, as an acknowledgment of the need of all mankind to be ransomed, each person numbered was to offer half a shekel to the service of the sanctuary as an atonement. Now, if we accept as actually historical as well as prophetic the words of the 69th Psalm, "The zeal of Thine house hath even eaten me," and remember that David had long been collecting materials for the Temple that his son was to build, so that this seems to have been one of Absalom's complaints against him, we see that this collection of half-shekels would much assist his project, and likewise be very unpopular among the disaffected Israelites, who would by refusing it bring on themselves the punishment threatened by the Law of God. This was probably the reason of Joab's so strongly protesting against the census: he did not care for the Temple, and he knew that the payment would anger the people; and therefore, it would seem, though he was obliged to collect the numbers, he took no pains to demand the payment, during his progress through the kingdom, the bounds of which are here

described—from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, from Gilead and Aroer in the east to the Phœnician borders in the west ; but he avoided the Benjamites, probably because they were the fiercest and most disaffected, and the Levites, because they were not obliged to serve in war, except by choice like Benaiah. The numbers were so great as to show the prosperity of Israel ; but probably it was the finding that the ransom money had been neglected, and that the great mass of the people had incurred the penalty threatened in the Law, that caused David's distress and repentance even before he had received the message from the Lord through the prophet Gad. The message offered three choices, all chastisements to the sinful people and diminutions of the numbers in which he had been putting his trust. They were : war, famine, and pestilence. David's reply in his submission seems to have meant that he would rather that the Lord should choose for him, and send the natural punishment, linked already with the offence—one, too, which would peril himself more than famine or than war would, at his age. He committed himself to the Lord, knowing the greatness of His mercy ; and the pestilence came, brought by an Angel of destruction, smiting, as we may fully believe, the men who had grudged their offering of faith to the Lord. That deadly plague can almost always be traced to men's uncleanness and neglect, is no reason for doubting that still it is sent by the Angel of the Lord, who has messengers of wrath as well as messengers of mercy. The sight of that terrible Angel, pausing with his sword over the beloved Jerusalem, is the only supernatural vision recorded in David's whole life. Inspired prophet as he was, there were no more miracles connected with his history than there are with our own. When he beheld the Angel, he fell on his face, clothed in sackcloth as he already was, and broke out in a prayer of agony. He it was who had caused the trespass by commanding the sum of the people to be taken. " Let thy hand be on me and on my father's house ; but these sheep, what have they done ? " And his prayer was heard. He was bid to offer an atonement, and then the wrath should be appeased, the people pardoned. Nor does this law of the half-shekel ever again appear to have been neglected. When there were yearly numberings in the later times, the offering was gathered as a matter of course ; and this

was the tribute money, or didrachma, that our Lord Himself paid by the miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth, after the protest that He, as the sinless Son of God, was not liable to that atoning price, which indeed He has paid for us, once for all. (Matt. xvii. 24—27.)

LESSON CXX.

THE PURCHASE OF THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE.

B.C. 1020.—2 SAM. xxiv. 19—25 ; 1 CHRON. xxi. 19—30 (*collated*);
1 CHRON. xxi. 1—5.

And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD.

And Araunah turned back, and saw the angel ; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Araunah was threshing wheat.

And as David came to Araunah, Araunah looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.

Then David said to Araunah, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD : thou shalt grant it me for the full price : that the plague may be stayed from the people.

And Araunah said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes : lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt-offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat-offering ; I give it all. All this did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king.

And king David said to Araunah, Nay ; but I will verily buy it for the full price : for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt-offerings without cost.

So David gave to Araunah for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.

And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and called upon the LORD ; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering.

And the LORD commanded the angel ; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.

For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon.

But David could not go before it to inquire of God : for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

Then David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and ~~this~~ is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel.

And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel ; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God.

And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings ; and brass in abundance without weight ;

Also cedar trees in abundance : for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.

And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries : I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

COMMENT.—Just beyond the walls of the new City of David, separated from it by a narrow, sharp, rocky valley, was a rocky hill, very steep on every side, and so flat and stony at the summit as to serve for one of those breezy threshing-floors used in the East. It was the same Mount Moriah whither Abraham had been sent to offer up Isaac, where he had received his son, as it were, from the dead, and had given the prophetic name Jehovah-jireh. It belonged to one of the conquered Jebusites, called, from a little change in the language, *Araunah* in Samuel, *Ornan* in Chronicles. Some fancy he had been king of Jebus, but this is not likely. At any rate, like many other of the heathen, he had submitted to David, given up his idolatry, and been admitted among the chosen. He was threshing wheat, with his four sons, watching the oxen tread it out from the straw, when the awful sight of the angel with the drawn sword was seen, and, in great terror, he and his sons hid themselves among the straw. But it was the Mount of Mercy—the hand was to be stayed. “The LORD will provide” an atonement was still true of it. In the midst of Araunah’s terror the aged king, clothed in sackcloth, with the elders of Jerusalem, and probably the priests, were seen climbing up the hill-side, and Araunah went out to meet them, and bowed before them. The first words of David were a request to be allowed to buy of him the rock of Moriah, that he might build an altar there, in obedience to God’s message that on the offering of faith the pestilence should cease. Araunah, in the fulness of his heart, would fain have freely given all—the rock itself, the oxen for the sacrifice, the threshing implements for wood—but David, in words that have

been a lesson to all times since, declared that he could not offer to God what had cost him nothing, and caused the full price of the whole hill to be paid to Araunah. The altar was raised in haste, burnt-offerings for sin were prepared, and peace-offerings to be partaken of in token of reconciliation; and then that special answer of God, now and then vouchsafed, was granted: the fire came down from heaven to consume the burnt-offering; and, as it appears, the awful and majestic form of the Angel threatening in the sky was seen, as it were, to sheathe the sword of vengeance and depart!

It is explained that the visible presence of this Angel, and the express command given through the prophet, had prevented David from going to make this expiatory sacrifice at the tabernacle at Gibeon; and when this answer by fire had come to him, and the spot had received this wonderful consecration, he knew that it must verily be the place which the Lord chose to set His name there, in preference to Shiloh, to Gibeon, or even to His own hill of Zion; though, even through David's own prophecies, further glory was promised "to the hill of Zion which He loved." And so the king designated the spot, and prepared more heartily than ever the work that his son was to carry out. Observe, that this great fulfilment of his desires was granted after the forgiveness of a sin of which he had repented before the punishment came. Our best blessings arise out of penitence.

LESSON CXXI.

DAVID'S CHARGE TO SOLOMON.

B.C. 1018.—I CHRON. xxviii. (*abridged*).

And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem.

Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house

of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building :

But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.

Howbeit the LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever : for he hath chosen Judah to be the ruler ; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father ; and among the sons of my father he liked me to make me king over all Israel :

And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.

And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts : for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.

Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments, and my judgments, as at this day.

Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God : that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind : for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts : if thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

Take heed now ; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary : be strong, and do it.

Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasures thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat,

And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasures of the house of God, and of the treasures of the dedicated things.

* * * * *

All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.

And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it : fear not, nor be dismayed : for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee ; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

And, behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, even they shall be with thee for all the service of the house of God : and there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship every willing skilful man, for any manner of service : also the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.

COMMENT.—Two charges of David to Solomon are recorded ; but as they are much alike, only one is given here. The first seems to have been in private, when showing him the stores of gold,

silver, brass, marble, and cedar-wood that had been the collection of his whole reign ; the second was in public, when the king, for the last time, gathered together all the chiefs from the tribes and families, and all his ministers of State. He rose up—an effort, for he was nearly threescore and ten, and was very frail and feeble—and addressed the assembly. He told them of his own earnest wish to have been the builder of the Temple of his God, and how this had been denied him because of the blood that he had shed ; but that, just as God had chosen Judah to have the sceptre out of all the sons of Jacob, and David himself out of all Jesse's sons, so He had fixed on Solomon, a younger one out of all his many sons, to be the man of peace, to build the House of God, to receive the promise, to sit on the throne, and continue the line to that everlasting kingdom dimly shadowed out. Then, turning to the youth, he exhorted him to trust resolutely to his God, assuring him of safety and wisdom so long as he leant wholly on Him ; and then, before all the people, the aged king delivered over to the youth the plan and pattern of the future Temple, as it had been made known to him by the Spirit—the Holy Spirit of God—even as Moses had been shown the pattern of the Tabernacle in the Mount. Temple and Tabernacle were alike symbols of things in the heavens ; therefore their design was not left to man's fancy, but revealed by God Himself.

And almost in the very words in which Moses had charged Joshua, "Be strong and of a good courage, for the Lord God, even *my* God," lovingly says David, "will not fail thee nor forsake thee." We can almost see the king, wearing the hoary head that his son well knew to be a crown of glory, encouraging the youth, beautiful and auburn-haired, like himself when he had slain Goliath, and at the same age, about seventeen, instead of the hardy, fearless shepherd lad—bold of speech, and ready against wild beast or Philistine—a thoughtful, studious, grave boy, bred in the palace, and overburdened already with the weight of the kingdom so soon to descend on him, and the mighty task before him. "Be strong and of a good courage, He will not fail thee nor forsake thee," is still the watchword of those on whom the burden descends, "when kings or parents pass away."

LESSON CXXII.

DAVID'S GREAT THANKSGIVING ANTHEM.

B.C. 1016.—1 CHRON. xxix. 1—22.

Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great : for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God.

Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood ; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance.

Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house,

Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal :

The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD ?

Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly,

And gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron.

And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite.

Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD : and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation : and David said,

Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.
Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power,
And the glory, and the victory, and the majesty :
For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine ;
Thine is the kingdom, O LORD,
And thou art exalted as head above all.
Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all ;
And in thine hand is power and might ;
And in thine hand it is to make great,

And to give strength unto all.
Now therefore, our God, we thank thee,
And praise thy glorious name.
But who am I, and what is my people,
That we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ?
For all things come of thee,
And of thine own have we given thee.
For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our
fathers:
Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.
O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee
an house
For thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.
I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart,
And hast pleasure in uprightness.
As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart
I have willingly offered all these things :
And now have I seen with joy thy people,
Which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.
O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers,
Keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of
thy people,
And prepare their heart unto thee :
And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart,
To keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes,
And to do all these things,
And to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.

And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God.
And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed
down their heads, and worshipped* the LORD, and the king.

And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings
unto the LORD, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a
thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their drink-offerings, and
sacrifices in abundance for all Israel :

And did eat and drink before the LORD on that day with great gladness.

COMMENT.—Here is one of the most beautiful of all the utter-
ances of David's life. He first begged the aid of all the great men
of Israel, for his young son, in the mighty work he had left to them,
and reminded them that the palace that was to be built was not for
man, but for God. "Because I have set my affection to the house
of my God," he says, he has prepared the gold and precious things
for it ; and he proposes to all the chiefs to consecrate their service
by freely giving with him, just as their fathers had offered their
gifts, in the wilderness, to deck the Tabernacle. Nor had David'

* Did honour by bending down.

reign been in vain. Forty years of such a king could not have but moulded many hearts, and the chastisements of Absalom's war and the late pestilence had not been lost on the others. They freely offered, with a perfect heart—namely, with hearts devoted to God, not only out of show or fashion or courtliness; and all was put into the hands of the Gershonite Levite, Jehiel the treasurer.

Then, in joy exceeding—joy as great as if the Temple-building had not been denied to him—in love so perfect as to cast out all thought of personal glory and honour, the man after God's own heart, who had less of self about him than any other upon earth, uttered his beautiful blessing and dedication.

See how he owns the eternal glory and power of the Almighty; how he acknowledges that everything comes from Heaven, so that at best they can but take of God's own and offer it to Him again, since none of them could be anything but strangers and travellers, dwelling here but a little while.

But it is vain to use words of our own to try to point out the wonderful beauty of this offering of David's whole heart and soul, on this day which must have been to him the crown of his whole life; and yet it was still the joy of looking forward—of hope, not possession. "There remaineth yet a rest for the people of God;" and David, when his evening-time was thus light, was very near to that rest. Life had dwindled to the ordinary threescore years and ten, and he had nearly lived them out, through his chequered, varied days—not sinless, but never unrepentant, and with the deep, earnest love of God and His glory above all.

LESSON CXXIII.*

THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL.

B.C. 1016.—2 SAM. xxiii. 1—7.

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,

The Spirit of the LORD spake by me,
And his word was in my tongue.
The God of Israel said,

* Not for the younger ones.

The Rock of Israel spake to me,
He that ruleth over men must be just,
Ruling in the fear of God.
And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth,
Even a morning without clouds ;
As the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after
rain.
For is not my house so with God ?
Because he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,
Ordered in all things, and sure :
For this is all my salvation, and all my desire ;
Will he not make it to grow ?*
But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away,
Because they cannot be taken with hands :
But the man that shall touch them
Must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear ;
And they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

COMMENT.—No one can doubt that David was, in the worldly point of view, one of the greatest kings that ever lived. He found Israel a loosely-held-together collection of tribes, their first attempt at a kingdom broken up, a foreign invader in the heart of the land, robber hordes overrunning it on all sides, without a centre, almost without power of union. After forty years he left it a well-regulated kingdom, with a capital so strong, by situation and fortification, as to be almost impregnable, the centre both of religious worship and government. Peace was established on every border, the dangerous nations had all been reduced and made tributary, and, to keep them still in check, twenty-four thousand Israelites were enrolled under tried and experienced officers, who took it in turn to serve month by month, and a guard of Philistines was always ready at the sovereign's call. There were, besides, governors in every part of the kingdom, charged to attend to every branch of agriculture—the wheat, the barley, the olives, the vineyards, the cattle—and to collect the king's dues, all kept in check by a strong, just hand. The man who brought about such a state of things might truly be called Great.

But David had qualities that make him dearer to us. These are the love and sweetness that never hardened through all the ingratitude he met with, the eager warmth and tenderness that nothing could

* The words in italics in our version make it appear as if David meant to confess that he had failed, and it had not been so with himself ; but the true purport of the original has been preserved in the reading we have ventured to give from Bishop Wordsworth.

quench, the loyalty to friendship, the generous affection and constancy of his nature. And what was that within him which kept these human qualities from passing away with youth? It was his love of God, his grief for displeasing Him, his perfect trust and submission; these kept him fresh and tender—unspoiled, unhardened—recovering always after every fall. These qualities, with inspiration shining through them, make David's prayers and praises the prayers and praises of us all.

It was David who instituted the singing of psalms as a constant portion of the daily worship of God. Courses of musician Levites took it in turn to be present before the Ark, and to keep up the chant of praise, for which purpose David delivered to them the first Book of Psalms, namely, the first forty, every one of which is his own. He had composed many others, such as the 51st and 69th, but most of them were so deeply connected with his own life and troubles, that he appears not to have placed them in this public hymn-book, nor given them to Asaph and Jeduthun. Of these psalms only a few have been given here which immediately connect themselves with his history; but in them and in the others we find that great steps had been made in the revelation of the Messiah. Besides the lamentations, that have a double meaning and go far beyond David's own woes, such as the 22nd Psalm, where he evidently feels that he is speaking with the voice of a greater sufferer, there are promises of the kingdom and the glory, going far beyond what he could hope for Solomon: and there are distinctly prophetic psalms, such as the 2nd, the 16th, and 110th, showing our Lord's suffering, His resurrection, and His everlasting priesthood; and we know, through our Lord Himself, that it was in spirit, that is, by the voice of the Holy Spirit, that David thus prophesied (Matt. xxii. 42). And there was another certainty now established, namely, that the Messiah would be an everlasting King and Priest, and would spring from David's line, being his Lord as well as his Son.

The last inspired words of David are given in Samuel, though not in the Psalms. They follow the long, beautiful 18th Psalm, on the history of his life, and are a sort of seal to all his prophecies. He signs them, as it were, in this short poem, giving his own name, then speaking of himself as God's anointed king, and the

Psalmist who had ordered the Temple service; but it is not he who speaks, he declares, but the Spirit of God—God the Holy Ghost, by whom holy men of old spake (2 Peter i. 21). Indeed, David is here moved to use words that own the Three Holy Persons of the Godhead—the Spirit of the Lord, the God of Israel, the Rock of Israel. First he seems to have a vision of a perfect ruler of men, who, he says, must be just, and if so becomes like a glorious cloudless morning, and, like tender grass, ever refreshed by the dew of God's grace, never parched, never exhausted, always blessed.

But the inner meaning is, that David sees the true King who should rise out of his house, perfectly just, bringing morning to the earth when He should arise on it like the sun shining on the new creation, fresh and revived by the dew of the Holy Spirit: "The dew of Thy birth is of the womb of the morning" (Psalm cx. 3). That promise was the everlasting covenant of salvation to David, and all his desire, which the Lord would assuredly make to grow. And he ends with a vision of judgment. Worthless men are as thorns, that no one gathers like the good corn, but can only be touched by hands fenced in iron and armed with weapons; and then they are only to be gathered in bundles and burned in the fire.

LESSON CXXIV.

THE REBELLION OF ADONIJAH.

I KINGS i. 32—53.

B.C. 1015.—One more disturbance vexed the last days of David. It is not quite clear whether it took place before or after his great reception of the gifts of the Israelites for the Temple, for it is related only in the First Book of Kings, while the thanksgiving anthem is only in that of Chronicles. We have placed it later because it joins rather with the history of Solomon than of his father. David had become very aged and feeble, and was confined to his chamber, when Adonijah, the eldest survivor of his sons, set

up his claim to the throne. His mother was named Haggith, one of the Hebrew wives; and he was as handsome and ambitious as Absalom. Unwilling to submit to the decree, divine though it was, which set a mere lad before him, he took advantage of his father's age and Solomon's youth to draw together a party of whom the chief were Joab, to whom the appointment of the man of peace was doubtless unwelcome, and Abiathar, the High Priest, who seems to have been jealous of Zadok, the head of the elder line of Aaron. With these, and all the men whom they could bring together, he went out to En-rogel, the fountain where the two young priests had once been hidden, and which seems to have belonged to a garden palace beyond the walls. Here Adonijah made a great feast, to which he called all his brothers except Solomon, and many of the mighty men. Tidings were brought to David in his sick chamber, first by Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and then by Nathan the prophet, and his resolution was taken as vigorously as ever.

And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king.

The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon :

And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel : and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon.

Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead : and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen : the LORD God of my lord the king say so too.

As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David.

So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon.

And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon.

And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.

And Adonijah and all the guests that were with him heard it as they had made an end of eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar ?

And while he yet spake, behold Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest

came : and Adonijah said unto him, Come in; for thou art a valiant man, and bringest good tidings.

And Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king.

And the king hath sent with him Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and they have caused him to ride upon the king's mule :

And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon : and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that ye have heard.

And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom.

And moreover the king's servants came to bless our lord king David, saying, God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne. And the king bowed himself upon the bed.

And also thus said the king, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it.

And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way.

And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon : for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword.

And Solomon said, If he will show himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth : but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die.

So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon : and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.

COMMENT.—David sent for those who remained faithful, Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the Levite warrior, commander of the Cherethites and Pelethites, and bade them place Solomon on the king's own mule, and take him to the valley of Gihon, just below Jerusalem, where Zadok and Nathan should anoint him with the holy oil, and he should be proclaimed with trumpet sounds and shouts of "God save the king." The command was executed, and the people of Jerusalem, trusting to the choice of their God and their king, and preferring the gentle, thoughtful, peaceful prince to his proud and headstrong brother, thronged out after him, and rent the air with their shouts of joy.

One day there was to be the cry in like manner, "Hosanna to the Son of David," when the Prince of Peace should enter Jerusalem, meek, and riding upon an ass.

The guests at En-rogel were feasting when the shouts and trumpet sounds startled them ; and while they wondered over it, the tidings of Solomon's proclamation were brought them by Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, once so faithful. It was clear that there was no hope for the cause of Adonijah, and all his festive party broke up and fled. He himself felt that his offence was so great, that he fled to the Tabernacle—most likely that at Gibeon—and clung to the horns of the altar (the projections, namely, used for fastening the victims), a spot whence he could neither be dragged away nor slain. He did not leave it until Solomon had made oath that he should be safe. Solomon's answer was, that if he were peaceful and worthy, he should be safe ; but if he should transgress again, he must die. And thus David's last days were spared the sorrow of the death of another of his children.

Abiathar and Joab had both been David's companions in his wanderings, and seemed personally attached to him ; but their love to him was not deepened by true love of God, and therefore, when his last decision, guided as it was by God Himself, displeased them, they showed it no respect, but, so far as in them lay, embittered his last days by turning against him. No friendship or gratitude is really worth anything unless the thought of God be first.

LESSON CXXV.

THE DEATH OF DAVID.

B.C. 1015.—I KINGS ii. 1—10 ; I CHRON. xxix. 23—30.

Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die ; and he charged Solomon his son, saying,

I go the way of all the earth : be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man ;

And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself :

That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me,

saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel.

Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet.

Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.

But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table : for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother.

And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim : but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword.

Now therefore hold him not guiltless : for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him ; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.

So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

* * * * *
Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered ; and all Israel obeyed him.

And all the princes, and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king.

And the LORD magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.

Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel.

And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years ; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour : and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.

Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer,

With all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

COMMENT.—The last charge David gave to Solomon on his death-bed was, first, another repetition of Moses's charge to Joshua, and an assurance that his obedience would bring a blessing. But then came an injunction, that some, who rudely find fault with God's holy ones, think proves a vindictiveness which David never showed in his lifetime. It concerned Joab and Shimei. For some reason, David, though fully sensible of

Joab's treacherous violence, had never been able to bring him to justice, but had been forced to leave unpunished the deaths of Abner and Amasa, besides that of Absalom, which even now he could not bear to mention. Innocent blood, unavenged, brought down the wrath of Heaven on the land, and David knew that Joab must fall under the murderer's sentence. He had never executed it himself, but Joab had lost his position by joining Adonijah, and thus Solomon might be able to do what his father could not. That it was justice, not revenge, is clear from David's mentioning not the death that grieved him, but those by which he had really profited. With regard to Shimei, he was an evil-minded factious person, of whom no doubt David knew much more harm than he tells here, though he was withheld from touching him by his oath at Bahurim; but Solomon, being under no such pledge, must not regard his father's mercy as a reason for sparing Shimei when he should give occasion for suspicion. In truth, these were the sons of Belial, the thorns only to be grasped with a mailed hand, and then to be rooted up. So far from hating them, it was David's mercy to them that rendered the charge needful, lest Solomon should be bound by it, and leave two dangerous enemies and criminals unpunished. In another simple line we hear how David died, or, in St. Paul's beautiful words, "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep" (Acts xiii. 36). What better can be said of any one than that he served his own generation by the will of God?

The books of the prophets Nathan and Gad, to which the Chronicles refer for David's history, are probably the latter part of the books of Samuel, compiled in his school of the prophets, where they seem to have been bred. The books of Samuel end with the numbering and the pestilence; then begin the books of Kings, which appear to have been drawn up in the same manner by the prophets in their colleges, and which form so entirely part of the same series, that they are sometimes numbered as the third and fourth of Kings.

LESSON CXXVI.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE REBELS

B.C. 1015.—I KINGS ii. 26—46.

And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields ; for thou art worthy of death : but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the LORD God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted.

So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD ; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

Then tidings came to Joab : for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD ; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him.

And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay ; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me.

And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him ; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father.

And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah.

Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever : but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD.

So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him : and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.

And the king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his room over the host : and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar.

And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee an house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither.

For it shall be, that on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die : thy blood shall be upon thine own head.

And Shimei said unto the king, The saying is good : as my lord the king

hath said, so will thy servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days.

And it came to pass at the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish, son of Maachah king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, Behold, thy servants be in Gath.

And Shimei arose, and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants : and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath.

And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again.

And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any whither, that thou shalt surely die? and thou saidst unto me, The word that I have heard is good.

Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with?

The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to,* that thou didst to David my father : therefore the LORD shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head.

And king Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever.

So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada ; which went out, and fell upon him, that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

COMMENT.—Solomon spared the life of Adonijah until he made a request that showed his treasonable designs were not laid aside. He wanted to marry a young girl who had been taken into David's house, but had never been his wife ; and Bathsheba, thinking the request harmless, was persuaded to lay it before her son. To take a woman from the late king's harem was in the East equivalent to being his successor, and Solomon, viewing this as a return to rebellion on Adonijah's part, and evidently detecting a plot among his former supporters, carried out the sentence he had formerly incurred.

As to Adonijah's companions, Solomon took away the exercise of the priestly office from Abiathar, and sent him to live in retirement at his own fields in the Levite city of Anathoth, about four miles from Jerusalem, sparing his life because he had shared in all David's wanderings. It is not unlikely that he had then acquired rough, irregular habits, which would not easily conform to the strict rules of the rightly regulated sanctuary, and that Zadok had therefore been put forward into almost equal dignity when the Ark

* Aware of, in secret.

was brought to Jerusalem, and then that jealousy and dislike to the new system made Abiathar hold with the opposite party. At any rate, thus was brought about the sentence pronounced on the children of Eli, that they should be put down from the high priesthood (1 Sam. ii. 31-35); and in Zadok, who was the descendant of the elder branch of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, was fulfilled the first accomplishment of the promise that God would raise up a faithful priest.

It is evident that Joab was in the plot with Adonijah and Abiathar, otherwise he would not have been so alarmed as to take refuge at the altar of Gibeon. Benaiah, being of priestly descent—though probably he had never entered the service, since a warrior's blood-stained hands could not sacrifice—was sent to drag him away; but Joab refused to leave the altar, thinking that he could not be slain there. The question was referred to the king, who decided that the holy place could be no protection to one guilty of so many murders, and against whom so much innocent blood cried out from the ground. That shedding of blood for blood, lest vengeance should fall upon the land, was one of the sternest laws of expiation in the old covenant, preparing the world to enter the better into the thought of the Blood that speaketh better things.

Shimei does not appear to have been concerned in either of the rebellions; indeed, he would naturally have hated one son of David as much as another; but, as a Benjamite, he abhorred the race that had succeeded Saul's, and he was probably anxious to bring about such defections as that of Sheba. Solomon did not choose to trust him out of Jerusalem, nor to allow him to enter into connection with the heathen princes around. So an oath was taken that Shimei would not go beyond Jerusalem, and the king warned him that it would be his death if he did so. He wilfully transgressed the oath. He could, of course, have asked the king's permission to go in pursuit of his runaway servants, or have sent after them; and the breaking of his pledge was a token of his contempt and disregard for Solomon's authority. He was therefore put to death, as Solomon had threatened; and thenceforth the young king's authority was firmly established, and all rebels overawed, so that until near the close of a long reign there never again was any disorder or disaffection.

And from the sad end of Joab and Abiathar we learn that to be the companions of the good does not always teach goodness, and that if it does not, the punishment is the heavier. Of faithful, affectionate Abishai we hear nothing, and, therefore, may hope that he died in peace and honour.

LESSON CXXVII.*

THE WORDS OF KING LEMUEL, WHICH HIS MOTHER
TAUGHT HIM.

PROV. xxxi. 10—31.

B.C. 1015.—*It is not quite certain, but there is great reason to believe that the poem that follows was Bathsheba's instruction to her son, on what the perfect woman ought to be, whom she hoped to see his wife. Lemuel means "dedicated to God," and might well be used to conceal the name of Solomon when the poem went forth among the Israelites. Not being Solomon's own, it appears not to have been added to the Book of Proverbs till Hezekiah's scribes collected such sayings as were current among the Israelites, but not written down. If it be indeed the queen's, it shows her to have had much wisdom and genius; and at the same time it is sad to think that she had fallen from her own high standard herself, or perhaps that, during her married life with David, she learnt what was the true glory of woman, and hoped to see in her son's wife what she could never be herself; though, alas! if she lived, it was to see how much stronger example is than precept.*

Who can find a virtuous woman?
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,
So that he shall have no need of spoil.
She will do him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
She seeketh wool, and flax,
And worketh willingly with her hands.
She is like the merchants' ships,
She bringeth her food from afar.
She riseth also while it is yet night,
And giveth meat to her household,
And a portion to her maidens.
She considereth a field, and buyeth it:
With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

* Not for the younger ones.

She girdeth her loins with strength,
And strengtheneth her arms.
She perceiveth that her merchandise is good :
Her candle goeth not out by night.
She layeth her hands to the spindle,
And her hands hold the distaff.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor ;
Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid of the snow for her household :
For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
She maketh herself coverings of tapestry ; *
Her clothing is silk and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sitteth among the elders of the land.
She maketh fine linen, and selleth it ;
And delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
Strength and honour are her clothing ;
And she shall rejoice in time to come.
She openeth her mouth with wisdom ;
And in her tongue is the law of kindness.
She looketh well to the ways of her household,
And eateth not the bread of idleness.
Her children arise up, and call her blessed ;
Her husband also, and he praiseth her.
Many daughters have done virtuously,
But thou excellest them all.
Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
But a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands ;
And let her own works praise her in the gates.

COMMENT.—This beautiful, most beautiful picture is an acrostic poem ; that is, its twenty-two verses begin with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in succession, no doubt to assist in its being remembered. And, indeed, every Christian as well as every Hebrew girl ought to know it by heart ; for, though a few of the customs are Eastern, the woman herself is, or ought to be, of all countries. The virtuous woman ! This means more than merely keeping out of vice. It might be the valiant woman, strong, sensible, and wise, though gentle. She is more precious than the ruby, for her husband not only need not lock her up, as in the East, but can leave all to her as his other self. “A woman can only be kept by four walls or four Gospels,” said a wise man ; and many a woman, by fretfulness, chattering, and selfishness, if she has no worse fault,

* Embroidery.

loses her husband's confidence, and is not like this valiant matron, who does him good all the days of her life. Her quiet home industry and activity come next ; her spinning flax and wool, so that she is ready with her savings to help her husband in his purchases, and obtain fields and vineyards. She keeps good order, and is ever early astir ; but she is not niggardly. Her hands are ever stretched out to aid the poor and needy ; her loins are girt, that is, she is always ready at the first call of distress : while yet her own household are well fed, on food brought by her providence from afar ; and are clad in suitable and costly apparel, fenced against the snow in scarlet mantles. Her husband is known when he takes his seat among the elders by the gates of the city, by his air of well-being and ease of mind. It is like the curious saying, "What a man's wife is may be known by his shirt." But she has better clothing than her purple and needlework, even strength and honour, ever about her. And her speech is good to hear, for not only is it wise, but "on her tongue is the law of kindness." O most precious law ! Yet she knows true kindness to her household is to look well to their ways, and not let them eat the bread of idleness ; and so it is that her children, well-trained, rise up and call her blessed, and her husband praiseth her. "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Favour, or charm of manner, cannot be trusted : beauty passes away ; but the woman who fears the Lord shall be praised ! And at the close of her life, that which she has done shall have its reward, and her works of piety and charity, her faithfulness and godliness, shall be her praise in the gates—which *we* know to be the gates of pearl of the heavenly Jerusalem.

There is the pattern of what woman may be ; and it ought to be far easier to a Christian woman to live up to it than for the Eastern wives, whom it first concerned.

[May the description, even while suiting the homeliest, go to the highest. For every wife may be the type and likeness of the Church, the spouse of Christ, and the mother of us all ; and she it is who watches over us, feeds, enlightens, and tends us, as the valiant woman is here described as doing, until we come to the time when she shall present unto her Lord the children who will assuredly then stand up and call her blessed.]

LESSON CXXVIII.*

A FEW VERSES OF THE SONG OF SONGS.

CANTICLES ii. 1—4 ; 8—17.

Solomon wrote many songs, but only one has been preserved. It may have been written in his early youth, when he married Naamah, the mother of his only son, or it may be his song of greeting to his Egyptian bride.

I am the rose of Sharon,
And the lily of the valleys.
As the lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.
As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
So is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his banner over me was love.

* * * * *

The voice of my beloved !
Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.
My beloved is like a roe or a young hart :
Behold, he standeth behind our wall ;
He looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the
lattice.
My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone ;
The flowers appear on the earth ;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ;
The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.
O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret places of the stairs,
Let me see thy countenance,
Let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice,
And thy countenance is comely.

* Not for the younger ; but I have thought it better to preoccupy the mind with some idea of this wonderful hymn.

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines :
For our vines have tender grapes.
My beloved is mine, and I am his :
He feedeth among the lilies.
Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,
Turn, my beloved,
And be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of
Bethel.

COMMENT.—The Song of Songs seems, as far as we can make out its history, to have been a poem written in Solomon's happy early youth, when the Lord was with him, and there was a glory round every action of his life. This, then, would seem to be the song of his happy marriage. Wedding feasts lasted seven days among the Jews, and some have thought that a part of this Song was sung on each of the days of the feast. It is a conversation between the bride and bridegroom, telling of the troubles that they have gone through, and their delight in being united.

The bridegroom is the Rose of Sharon, a rich tract under Mount Carmel: the bride is called the Lily among thorns; but she seems to have had elder brothers, who made her tend their vineyard, and watch their flocks, so that she was dark and sun-burnt because the sun had looked on her (i. 6). Solomon had a house upon the slopes of Mount Lebanon—foundations, supposed to belong to it, have lately been found—and there in the spring-time, which he so beautifully describes, when the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard (ii. 12), do we find the scene of the poem. Solomon himself was a shepherd's son, and never forgot that "the king himself is served in the field" (Eccles. v. 9); and it was by the sheepfolds that he seems to have first met his beloved. What is meant for poetry, and what for fact, and what for allegory, is not clear; but it seems as if the daughters of Jerusalem had been sent to receive the maiden, and then as if there had been some separation, in which she sought him in vain; but at length he came, beaming with his glory, and was betrothed to her in her mother's house. The Song may have been composed to be sung on the days of the marriage feast, when they showed themselves to the people in royal state. "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon, with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him

in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart."

But all this is guessed and gathered from the words of the Song. It is much more important as a prophecy of what is to come, than as a narrative of what is past ; it has far more to do with the Prince of Peace than with the King of Israel. Single verses are prophetic allusions to events of our Lord's history upon earth,—such as the hair perfumed with spikenard as He sat at table (i. 12) ; and the wandering of the maiden in search of her beloved, in the early morning, is described in words that well suit with the holy women who on Easter Eve sat mourning, while He they loved was "in the clefts of the rock" (ii. 14), and sought Him in the dawn in spite of the watchmen, then heard the voice of the beloved, found Him, and would not let Him go (iii. 1-4), but "held Him by the feet and worshipped Him," in the fresh sweetness of the garden in the spring-tide, Easter, when "the day had broken and the shadows had fled away" (iv. 6).

But it is not even with this daybreak that the Song of Songs is most concerned. "A greater than Solomon is here," both in this Song and in the 45th Psalm ; and the bridal is that which St. John beheld in a vision, and described in his 21st chapter of the Book of Revelation. It is the bridal to which we are invited guests, where, if we will keep our lights burning, we shall be among "the virgins that be her fellows," and who shall go forth to see our King in His beauty, and enter into the King's palace. The bride is she whom He presents unto Himself, a glorious Church, "all glorious within," "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27), "the dove, the undefiled." Therefore it is that He is said to "make His flock to lie down at noon," and that her dowry is the vineyard ; for the smallest events in the lives of those of old time were made to foreshow the great blessings that were to follow.

Even the Jews knew that this Song related to the Christ, and in their Chaldee paraphrase said, "Thy fairness, O King Messiah, exceedeth the sons of men." They knew that the union between God and His Church was often shown under the likeness of a marriage ; and in this sense, no doubt, the Song had full meaning, especially where, at the end, it speaks of the Gentile Church as a

little sister, and says, "What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?" (Cant. viii. 8).

But it also means the Church Universal, betrothed from the beginning unto her Saviour, losing sight of Him for a time, then mourning till she finds Him again, when He sheds His light abroad on the earth, and at length, when He appears in His glory, united to Him for ever.

And lastly, this wonderful Song expresses the yearnings of the devout soul towards the Saviour; how dreary and grievous it is to lose communion with Him for a time, and to miss the sense of His comfort and presence; and how exceeding is the joy of being again filled with the fulness of His love, and of resting upon Him. "His left hand should be under my head, and His right arm should embrace me." For indeed He has embraced us with the arms of His mercy, and His is the exceeding great love which is strong as death, and cannot be quenched by many floods.

LESSON CXXIX.*

SOLOMON'S MARRIAGE.

B.C. 1014.—I KINGS iii. 1; PSALM xlv.

And Solomon made affinity† with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.

* * * * *

My heart is inditing‡ a good matter :
I speak of the things which I have made touching the king :
My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.
Thou art fairer than the children of men :
Grace is poured into thy lips :
Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty,
With thy glory and thy majesty.
And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness
and righteousness ;

* Not for the younger. Some think the Psalm belongs to a later king.

† Connected himself.

‡ The word properly means "swelling over with."

And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.
 Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies ;
 Whereby the people fall under thee.
 Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever :
 The sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.
 Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness :
 Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness
 above thy fellows.

All thy garments smell of myrrh,* and aloes, and cassia,†
 Out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.
 Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women :
 Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.
 Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ;
 Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house ;
 So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty :
 For he is thy Lord ; and worship thou him.
 And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift ;
 Even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour.
 The king's daughter is all glorious within :
 Her clothing is of wrought gold.
 She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework : ‡
 The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto
 thee.
 With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought :
 They shall enter into the king's palace.
 Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children,
 Whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.

I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations :
 Therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.

COMMENT.—There was no command against marrying women who were not of the Seven Nations, and Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh Psin-en-san. Now, as we have seen, Solomon being the type of our blessed Lord reigning as a king in peace and glory, his marriage becomes the special type of the union of Christ and His Church ; and then, his mother's model of a perfect wife, his own song of love, and the poem with which the musical sons of Korah greeted his wedding, all were so breathed into by God the Holy Ghost, who spake by the prophets, as to be full of prophecy ; and that the bride was a stranger added force to the type, since she resembled the Gentile Church united to her Lord. This 45th Psalm bears the title, "A Song of Loves," and the words, "upon Shoshannim" (the lilies), most likely lily-shaped cymbals. It is in

* Pure aromatic perfume.

† Slips of the bark of the cassia.

‡ Or, over carpets of embroidery.

three divisions. The first describes the king riding in the procession in his beauty ; the second, his stern majesty and justice, and unction with the oil of gladness ; the third comes to the wedding itself, and the hangings of the palace pervaded with sweet perfumes, while ladies from ivory-inlaid palaces are waiting to welcome the bride to her new home. She shall stand on his right hand, arrayed in gold, and to her the minstrel addresses the exhortation, to forget her own land, and become wholly her lord's and king's ; so that he shall delight in her, and she shall do him honour. The rich Tyrian land shall send gifts, and all entreat her favour. There she waits, *within*, that is, in her inner apartment, clothed in tissues of gold, till she is conducted to the king's presence over carpets of embroidery, with all her train of attendant maidens, coming with joy and gladness into his palace. There she is promised that, instead of the father's family she has left at home, she shall have children who shall become princes in all lands. The psalm suits the course of an Eastern wedding, where the bridegroom rides first, under a canopy, magnificently robed and attended ; and afterwards, the bride, richly adorned and veiled, is conducted to him in his house, by her attendant maidens, with all the gifts displayed.

But no earthly king, no earthly marriage, could truly come up to the words of the psalm ; and so it was always felt. That the full union and glory in heaven of our Lord and His people was to be as His marriage He showed Himself, in His parables of the guests bidden to the wedding feast, and of the virgins attending : nay, He took unto Himself the name of the Bridegroom. Again, St. Paul showed to the Ephesians that marriage was the likeness of that blessed union (Eph. v.):—

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh ; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church :

For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery : but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

And the Epistle to the Hebrews directly applies this psalm to our Lord (i. 8):—

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

But it was St. John who beheld in one of his greatest and most marvellous visions the fulfilment and unfolding of this psalm. There he beheld Him who is the Prince of Peace, and yet a conqueror, the true Bridegroom (Rev. xix. 11—16):—

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse ; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns ; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood : and his name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations : and he shall rule them with a rod of iron : and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

For Him was the call :—

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia : for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white : for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And, that he might see the Bride in all her beauty, he heard the call :—

Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

Having the glory of God : and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

These visions are all, like this psalm, glorified ; and as we know

that the Glorious Saviour is Himself the Bridegroom, riding on, because His kingdom is always coming, so we know that the Bride is the Church—the whole multitude of souls who have joined themselves for ever to Him. In one sense, we, as Christians, belong to them, and so are joined in the Bride. In another sense we are companions and guests—happy, most happy to be bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb; when, if we be not of the number of the foolish and wicked who are shut out, we shall more fully know the meaning of the glorious psalm and the still more glorious vision.

LESSON CXXX.

THE CHOICE OF SOLOMON.

B.C. 1014.—2 CHRON. i. 1—6; 1 KINGS iii. 5—15.

And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly.

Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers.

So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness.

But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem.

Moreover the brazen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it.

And Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before the LORD, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it.

* * * * *

In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of

David my father : and I am but a little child : I know not how to go out or come in.

And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad : for who is able to judge thus thy so great a people ?

And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.

And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life ; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies ; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment ;

Behold, I have done according to thy words : lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart ; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour : so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

And Solomon awoke ; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt-offerings, and offered peace-offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

COMMENT.—As soon as Solomon had taken possession of his kingdom after his father's death, he collected the heads of all the tribes and all the captains of his army, to hold a solemn festival with him at Gibeon, before the old Tabernacle which had been made at Mount Sinai. The Ark of the Covenant was at Jerusalem in David's tabernacle, but the brazen altar made by Bezaleel in the wilderness was still at Gibeon, and there Solomon held his great feast of sacrifice, where all the heads of Israel joined, and made their offerings ; so that a thousand were made upon the altar. It was as it were the farewell to the old Tabernacle, which was about to pass away, in favour of the more solid House of God which Solomon was about to build.

And God Himself sanctioned the change by appearing to Solomon at night at Gibeon, and promising to give him what he should ask.

Solomon's answer was beautiful and full of humility. He was twenty years old, and he felt how weak and inexperienced he was ; a mere child, as he calls himself, who knew not how to deal with that great people, who clustered on every terraced slope, in every

valley, turbulent, restless, scarce yet reduced to order. Therefore his entreaty was for a wise and understanding heart, to enable him to judge rightly and prudently. It is the same as our prayer in the collect for Whitsunday for a right judgment in all things. The speech pleased the Lord. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." The young king had not asked for long life, nor riches, nor the death of his enemies, but for true wisdom. Therefore, not only should the gift he esteemed most be granted unto him, but the wealth and glory he had not asked should be added to him ; and, if he persevered in the paths of wisdom, he should live long and prosperously. Well, then, might Solomon declare of wisdom—

Length of days is in her right hand,
And in her left hand riches and honour.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.

This wisdom that he asked for, and that was so abundantly granted him, was, as it would seem, a clear, discerning judgment, and great powers of the mind or intellect, together with such spiritual insight as enabled him to be an inspired writer. He had to the full all gifts of the mind ; he could see to perfection what was right. The one thing that he does not seem always to have had, was a perfect *will* always to do what he saw to be right. We do not know whether he ought to have asked for it, or whether he trusted to the present longing of his young heart always to serve the Lord, if only he knew how ; or whether this grace and power were included in his entreaty for heavenly wisdom, and he allowed himself to swerve and fall. All we do know is, that it was just this want of a perfect will that made his latter days lack the dewy freshness and sweetness of those of his father, and that gifts of the mind, precious as they are, must give place to the "more excellent way," namely, that of charity.

LESSON CXXXI.

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON.

1 KINGS iii. 19—28 ; iv. 20—34.

B.C. 1014.—Soon after Solomon's accession, an incident occurred that greatly spread the fame of his sagacity. Two women, each with a young infant, one only three days older than the other, were sleeping in the same house. They came before the king, one of them making her complaint.

This woman's child died in the night, because she overlaid it.

And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.

And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead : but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear.

And the other woman said, Nay ; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No ; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king.

Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead : and the other saith, Nay ; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living.

And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.

And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.

Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise * slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it : she is the mother thereof.

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged ; and they feared the king : for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.

And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river† unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt : they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.

And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal,

* By no means.

† Euphrates.

Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl.

For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azra,* over all the kings on this side the river : and he had peace on all sides round about him.

And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon.

And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.

And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month : they lacked nothing.

Barley also and straw for the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.

And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

For he was wiser than all men ; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol : and his fame was in all nations round about.

And he spake three thousand proverbs : and his songs were a thousand and five.

And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall : he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

COMMENT.—Each woman professed to be the mother of the living child, and as there was nothing but their word for it, Solomon used the sure test of trying which loved it best. The woman who would rather see it cut in twain than not disappoint her rival, could not be the true mother ; but she who cared only to save its life deserved the decree, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." The story has many meanings, but one will be enough to think of now, namely, the difference between real love and mere rivalry. Jealous rivalry would destroy the object of competition, to prevent another from obtaining it. Love would forego all her own share in what is most dear to her, give it up even to a rival, if it be for its good.

This is the judgment of Solomon recorded in the Scripture ; but Jewish tradition and Eastern romance teem with stories of his decisions—some beautiful, some grotesque and wild. Suleiman-

* Gaza.

ben-Daoud, as the Arabs call him, is the greatest and wisest of sages, ruling, not only in this earthly world, but in the world of spirits. His memory has never been lost for that wonderful wisdom and knowledge. His historian has heaped together all the wise men he ever heard of, to enhance the king's wisdom by comparison, little thinking that but for this they would never have been heard of. His wisdom expressed itself in three thousand proverbs, of which comparatively a few had the salt of inspiration, and are preserved to us in his books ; and his songs were one thousand and five, one being the Song of Solomon, another the 127th Psalm :

Except the LORD build the house,
They labour in vain that build it :
Except the LORD keep the city,
The watchman waketh but in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows : for so he giveth his beloved sleep.
Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD,
And the fruit of the womb is his reward.
As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man,
So are children of the youth.
Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them :
They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies
in the gate.

Here the king seems to be thinking of the great work before him, and of his need that the Lord should aid him ; and there seems, too, to be a reference to his dream. "His beloved" is his own prophetic name, Jedidiah, and the verse might be translated, "He giveth His beloved blessings in their sleep."

Another point noted in Solomon's wisdom was his knowledge of all the natural creation—all animals, and all plants, from the cedar to the small creeping plant on the wall. Such knowledge, then, when it helps us to enter more into the wondrous providence, glory, and mercifulness of our God, is a good and blessed thing, helping to make us innocently happy, and to love and praise God for the works which He hath made.

It is a grand, bright picture that we have here of the young and peaceful king, ruling from his mountain nest at Jerusalem, from the Thapsacus, or Tiphshah, the ford on the Euphrates, even to the borders of Egypt—"from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river

Euphrates," as Abraham had been promised ; or, as it stands in David's psalm of promise (the 72nd)—

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the river unto the ends of the earth.
They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him,
And his enemies shall lick the dust.

And this grand dominion was perfectly peaceful. There never was such peace again till the great hush came over the world, one thousand years later, for the coming of the greater than Solomon, the King of Peace. David's toils and wars had won glory and rest, and Solomon and his people had entered into their labours. The ruins strewn so thickly now over hill and dale, in Palestine, bear witness to the multitudes who thronged it then, richly enjoying all those blessings of the vine and fig-tree, the basket and the store that God had covenanted to give them. For a hundred years and more, under Samuel, Saul, and David, there had been no idolatry, and God was keeping His word, in giving peace, plenteousness, honour, and glory, under a king whose largeness of heart, his love, his depth, his openness to understand, were unexampled. Every one might live at ease, sheltered under the vine or fig-tree trained on trellis-work over his door, with no fear of the marauding desert tribe, to steal cattle or children. Solomon's great army saved all such danger. The army had been regulated by David, and the divisions served a month at a time. The king's household, too, was on a magnificent scale, and it is calculated, from the provisions here mentioned, that it could not have consisted of less than fourteen thousand persons : yet in these earlier, happier days, there was no oppression. Justice was done on all sides, and David's prayer was fulfilled :—

Give the king thy judgments, O LORD,
And thy righteousness unto the king's son :
Then shall he judge thy people with righteousness,
And the poor with judgment.

But that 72nd Psalm looked far beyond Solomon, and only in One could its promise be entirely fulfilled :

His name shall endure for ever ;
His name shall continue as long as the sun :
And men shall be blessed in him ;
All men shall call him blessed !

LESSON CXXXII.

THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE TEMPLE.

B.C. 1014.—1 KINGS v. 1—18.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon ; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father : for Hiram was ever a lover of David.

And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying,

Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet.

But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent.*

And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.

Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon ; and my servants shall be with thy servants : and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint : for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians.

And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people.

And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for : and I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir.†

My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea : and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them : and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household.

So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire.

And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil : thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year.

And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him : and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon ; and they two made a league together.

* Thing to meet him.

† Cypress.

And king Solomon raised a levy* out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men.

And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy.

And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains;

Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work.

And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house.

And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

COMMENT.—The nobleness of David had won him the admiration of Hiram, king of the merchant city of Tyre. The Phœnician cities between Lebanon and the sea had long been the marts of all the world, and their ships by sea, their camels by land, had penetrated into regions unknown to all around, and brought their most precious wares, while their own arts of manufacture were in advance of all others. Their religion was the most corrupt form of the Canaanite worship, with Baal, Moloch, and Astarte for its gods; but it seems not to have prevented Hiram, king of Tyre, the only one of the cities that was then a kingdom, from conceiving a great respect for David. He sent an embassy to congratulate Solomon on his accession, and Solomon took the opportunity of obtaining assistance in his preparations for his great work. His letter and Hiram's answer were to be seen after 1,000 years in the records of Tyre, as well as in the books of Kings and Chronicles. Hiram had built temples himself upon the three islets that were the foundations of the elder Tyre; and his subjects were more experienced in all the arts of building than the Israelites. Solomon, therefore, begged for assistance from them in the obtaining of wood from Mount Lebanon. It seems that a particular soil of débris, brought down a mountain by the action of an ancient glacier, is peculiarly favourable to the growth of those mountain trees, the cedar, pine, and fir, and that when undisturbed they will grow on to an enormous size and beauty. Such a forest was found in Central America a few years back under the same conditions as the wood

* Men called out.

of Lebanon, and containing trees of the most marvellous bulk. Probably the "cedars of Lebanon which the Lord had planted" had been growing for this very purpose ever since their mountain had been upheaved. These were the trees for which Solomon undertook to give in exchange supplies of wheat and oil from the fertile plains of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Issachar, for the supply of the Tyrian palace. For the cutting of these grand trees Solomon called out 30,000 men, who went 10,000 for a month at a time to Lebanon, to cut and lop the trees under the direction of Hiram's experienced woodsmen, and then to fasten the trunks together in rafts or floats, so that they might go by sea, along the coast to Joppa, where they were landed, to be brought up to Jerusalem.

Besides these wood-cutters, there were 80,000 stone-cutters in the quarries near Jerusalem, with 70,000 bondsmen of the Canaanites, to hew and shape the enormous blocks of stone and marble to be employed in building. Tyrian stonemasons seem to have superintended, and there were 3,300 foremen, to keep order and give directions—not taskmasters as in Egypt; for all, save the bondsmen, were labouring freely for their God and their king. Some of the blocks that still remain are seventeen and eighteen feet long, one twenty-four feet long and eight wide; some, now far below the surface, bear the Phœnician masons' marks in red paint: and when we recollect the hilliness of the country and the few mechanical inventions known even to the wisest of kings, the great numbers employed and the length of time they were occupied will not seem strange. In the meantime Solomon was at work at the foundations. What his work there was has only been at all understood quite of late, when it has been found that he must have begun by levelling the summit of Mount Moriah, where the old threshing-floor had been, and filling up the sides and slopes, so as to make a broad platform for his Temple to stand upon. But this was not done only by tumbling masses of rock together. No, the whole underground portion is carefully built and tunnelled with passages: some to secure a plentiful supply of water, so much needed by the Jewish ritual; others to conduct off that water, together with the blood of the sacrifices, down into the brook Kedron, to be carried away to the Dead Sea; others to serve as secret exits and hiding-places.

The hill stood with two sides steep, detached, and precipitous ; another more easy of approach towards the country ; the fourth, separated from Jerusalem by a ravine, which the king proposed to bridge over. The more Mount Moriah is examined, the more Solomon's skill in engineering and careful foresight are apparent.

LESSON CXXXIII.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

E.C. 1012.—2 CHRON. iii. and 1 KINGS vi. vii.
(*abridged*).

Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign.

And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither : so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.

And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying,

Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them ; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father :

And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.

So Solomon built the house, and finished it.

And the oracle* he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD.

So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold : and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle ; and he overlaid it with gold.

And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house : also the whole altar that was by the oracle he overlaid with gold.

And within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree.

And he overlaid the cherubims with gold.

* The place where the Lord spake, the Holy of Holies.

And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without.

And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold, within and without.

And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre.

He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass : and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work.

And he made a molten sea : it stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east : and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.

And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basons. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he had made king Solomon for the house of the Lord.

In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan.

And Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because they were exceeding many : neither was the weight of the brass found out.

And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained unto the house of the LORD : the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shewbread was,

And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold,

And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers of pure gold ; and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple.

So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated ; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the LORD laid, in the month Zif : *

And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, † which is the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it.

COMMENT.—Only a few verses have been here given from the description of the building of the Temple, as it may be easier to understand the account of it which diligent students have gathered from the Scripture narrative and other testimony, and put into words and measurements of the present day. The Temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's reign (B.C. 1012). It took seven years to build, and was finished B.C. 1005. The huge stones of which it was built had all been shaped in their own

* The flower month, about May.

† The fruit month, about October.

quarry, so that no crashing axe or thundering hammer broke the silence of the building.

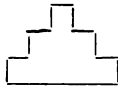
“ Then in awful state
The Temple reared its everlasting gate.
No workman's steel, no ponderous axes rung ;
Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung.
Majestic silence ! then the harp awoke,
The cymbal clanged, the deep-voiced trumpet spoke.”

It reminds us how we, the living stones of God's holy Temple, are shaped and moulded here below, to be built up silently, one by one, in heaven.

For the brazen work within, Solomon obtained the services of another Hiram, who is thus described by his namesake the king of Tyre, when he sent him at Solomon's request :—“ The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson ; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father.” (2 Chron. ii. 14.) His mother, then, was of the tribe of Dan, the same from which had come Aholiab, one of the artificers of the old Tabernacle ; his father a Naphtalite, on whose death she had married a Tyrian, so that her son had been brought up among the skilful Phœnician craftsmen—thus consecrating the art and ability that reigned there to God's service. His work was done on the other side of the Jordan, near Succoth, for the sake of the clay soil which was required to make the moulds for casting the brass, which was provided in abundance beyond all reckoning, while all the lesser implements for the service of the Sanctuary were of pure gold.

The general plan and system of the Tabernacle, according to the pattern given to Moses in the Mount, were followed out, they being the shadows or emblems of eternal truths ; and, indeed, every vision of heaven of which we have the record reveals itself to the eye of man as an intensely glorified tabernacle or temple ; as if the framework, if such a word may be used, were always the same, and the model of that of the Sanctuary “made with hands.” So

the Temple was an enlarged Tabernacle, with solid walls instead of curtains, and a roof overlaid with gold instead of seal and ram skins. The size of the building of the Temple was not great, however. It was not wanted to contain worshippers; they were in the courts outside. It was to be the shrine of the Ark with the Mercy Seat, and no great space was needed for this. So the Holy of Holies—the Oracle, as it is here called—was only twenty cubits every way, a perfect cube of nearly thirty feet, with a doorway of five sides, leading into the Holy Place, of the same width as the Oracle, but twice the length, and raised ten cubits higher—just double the size it had been in the Tabernacle. It was due east and west, the Oracle to the east. Beyond it lay a porch, or hall, of the same width and height, but ten cubits in length. Above this porch and Holy Place were two stories of chambers, raising the height to one hundred and twenty cubits, or one hundred and eighty feet. This was the Sanctuary itself, the only covered part, scarcely so large as many of our village churches, though very lofty when seen from without; and there were side chambers added at the basement story, so that the outline was of stages gradually narrowing—a remembrance of the sloping sides of the tent, and of the aspiring of all true religion to heaven. This stood in the midst of a



court for the priests, with a low wall of separation, and raised above the outer court for the congregation, which was parted again by another wall to form a court, lower down and further off, for worshippers from other nations. The outer walls of these courts had a deep shady cloister, supported on pillars, running round them, with an upper story of chambers which served for the lodging of the priests, Levites, and others employed in the service of the Temple. Within the court of the priests stood the great brazen sea, or laver, a huge vessel of brass, measuring forty-five feet round the rim, and supported on the backs of twelve brazen oxen, three looking to each point of the compass; and ten lesser lavers, mounted on wheels, for the priests to wash in, were around. A great brazen altar for burnt-offerings, fifteen feet high and thirty long, stood exactly where David had offered his sacrifice. Behind, close to the porch, were two great pillars of brass, their capitals ornamented with pomegranates and a network of chains, and

called *Jachin*, "He will establish," and *Boaz*, "strength." Inside the Holy Place was the altar of incense, overlaid with gold, the shew-bread table, also golden, and the candlesticks of seven branches, ranged five on each side. It was wainscoted with cedar, laid over on all sides with gold, worked in patterns of cherubim and pomegranates. There were folding cedar doors towards the porch, but the pentagonal opening to the Holy of Holies was crossed with chains of gold, and hung with a curtain of the richest texture of blue, scarlet, and white, worked with gold. Two colossal figures of cherubim of olive wood covered with gold were there, the tips of their wings meeting, so as to shadow over the empty space beneath them. The walls of the courts were of stone, the pavements of polished marble, the steps from one court to another rose up like terraces, and rising above all was the Sanctuary, with the entire roof glittering with gold, all coming up from the steep precipitous mountain, which it entirely covered and crowned. Truly nothing so wonderful for "glory and for beauty," or so exceeding "magnifical" could ever have been seen! (For the typical meaning refer to Lesson XXXV. Book II.)

LESSON CXXXIV.

THE DEDICATION.

B.C. 1005.—2 CHRON. v.

Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the LORD was finished : and Solomon brought in all the things that David his father had dedicated ; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God.

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.

Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month.

And all the elders of Israel came ; and the Levites took up the ark.

And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up.

Also king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude.

And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims ;

For the cherubims spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above.

And they drew out the staves of the ark, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle ; but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day.

There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place : (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course :

Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets :)

It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD ; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever : that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD ;

So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud : for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

COMMENT.—This was one of the greatest days that Israel had ever known, when, in the glory of early autumn, just before the feast of the seventh month, namely, the Tabernacles, the house of God was to be dedicated. That Tabernacle feast was in memory of the bowers of branches of the first halt of Israel at liberty ; and it looked on to the time when the Tabernacle of God should be among men. So the consecration of the Temple, which was but a tabernacle after all, came fitly at that time.

The glad, rejoicing multitudes came together from every quarter of their happy, peaceful land ; the old Tabernacle was reverently brought from Gibeon ; the Ark was taken up from its tent on Mount Zion, and borne up the hill by the Kohathite Levites, while, as it crossed the courts, sacrifices innumerable were presented at the great brazen altar—some probably to cleanse the new Sanctuary, and to hallow the worship, because nothing could be sacrificed without blood.

Then the priests took the Ark, and bore it across their court into the Holy Place, between the rows of candlesticks, into the Holy of Holies, and set it down between the cherubim, beneath their overshadowing wings—the Ark holding now nothing but the two tables of stone written with the finger of God, given to Moses the second time. The Book of the Law was by the side of the Ark ; Aaron's rod, and the golden pot of manna, which had been there in the Tabernacle times, seem to have been lost. But the staves by which the Ark had been carried were not taken away, but pulled forward in their rings, so as to be seen from the Holy Place, in memory of the wanderings of old of the Ark ; and likewise that God's revelation had still to go forward. It was a dark place, in spite of the gold, where the Ark was set down. In the Holy Place were narrow windows, apparently with weather-boards to protect them, such as we see in church towers ; there was the flame of the incense, and the light of the seventy lamps on their candlesticks, but the chamber within had no light at all, save what might gleam through the curtain. As soon as the Ark was set down, the whole body of musical Levites, under Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, upon the steps of the court of the priests, broke out with musical instruments, and with one voice, in perfect harmony, broke out together :—

Praise the LORD, for He is good ;
For His mercy endureth for ever.

And as they sang—oh, wonder of wonder ! awe of awe ! joy of joy ! that Cloud of glory which had been seen by their fathers, but which had been absent from them so long—the Cloud that betokened the actual presence of God—rested on the Mercy Seat, and filled the dark chamber with unutterable light, so that the priests came forth dazzled, struck with awful joy, and unable to stand before that intensity of glory !

LESSON CXXXV.*

THE BLESSING OF SOLOMON.

B.C. 1005.—2 CHRON. vi. 1—13.

Then said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.

But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.

And the king turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel: and all the congregation of Israel stood.

And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth to my father David, saying,

Since the day that I brought forth my people out of the land of Egypt I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there; neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my people Israel:

But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel.

Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.

But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart:

Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name.

The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.

And in it have I put the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, that he made with the children of Israel.

And he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands:

For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court: and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven.

COMMENT.—The king's own station at this great dedication was on a stage or platform of brass before the altar, so that he could be

* Not for the younger ones.

seen by every one. First he turned towards the east, and offered up his building to God : "The Lord hath said He would dwell in the thick darkness" (the dark inner shrine). "But I have built an house of habitation for Thee, and a place for Thy dwelling for ever." Then, facing round to the people, he uttered a blessing, summing up the story of the building, blessing them and calling on them to bless God with him, for the fulfilment of this, his father's wish. For indeed it was the brightest day that the nation of Israel ever beheld. Before passing on to Solomon's beautiful prayer of intercession, let us turn to the 132nd Psalm, which, though not sung at the time of this dedication, with David's Psalms of Mount Zion, assuredly refers to it, and is joined with them whenever our churches are consecrated. It is likewise sung on Christmas Day, because it dwells so much on the promise to David :—

LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions :
How he sware unto the LORD,
And vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob ;
Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house,
Nor go up into my bed ;
I will not give sleep to mine eyes,
Or slumber to mine eyelids,
Until I find out a place for the LORD,
An habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.

Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah :
We found it in the fields of the wood.
We will go into his tabernacles :
We will worship at his footstool.

Arise, O LORD, into thy rest ;
Thou, and the ark of thy strength.
Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness ;
And let thy saints shout for joy.
For thy servant David's sake
Turn not away the face of thine anointed.

The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David ;
He will not turn from it ;
Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.
If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall
teach them,
Their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.
For the LORD hath chosen Zion ;
He hath desired it for his habitation.
This is my rest for ever :
Here will I dwell ; for I have desired it.

I will abundantly bless her provision :
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
I will also clothe her priests with salvation :
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
There will I make the horn of David to bud :
I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.
His enemies will I clothe with shame ;
But upon himself shall his crown flourish.

Indeed it goes far beyond what the framers could have understood. "Turn not away the presence of Thine Anointed" must have at first meant, "Take not away the line of David from the throne, and from worshipping in the Temple." But in its prophetic sense it pointed to the true Anointed, the Messiah—the Christ—whose Presence in the flesh should come to that hill of Moriah. And when we say it, it is with reference to Him who will ever be where two or three are gathered together in His name. Or, again, we dwell on it as we entreat that our Church may never merit that He should depart from us : or, in reference to our newly-consecrated buildings, that He will be there in His holy Sacraments, and never leave us. And verily many a House of God has stood unharmed twice as long as ever did Solomon's Temple.

LESSON CXXXVI.*

SOLOMON'S INTERCESSION.

B.C. 1005.—2 CHRON. vi. 14—42.

And Solomon said, O LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven nor in the earth ; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts :

Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him ; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel ; yet so that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me.

Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified† which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David.

* Not for the younger ones.

† Made to come true.

But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!

Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee:

That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place.

Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.

If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house;

Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness.

And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house;

Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers.

When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them;

Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance.

If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting,* or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be:

Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house:

Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:)

That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched-out arm; if they come and pray in this house;

Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name.

* Blight on the crops.

If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name ;

Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near ;

Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly ;

If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name :

Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee.

Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength : let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness.

O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed : remember the mercies of David thy servant.

COMMENT.—Solomon's prayer of consecration cannot be divided, and therefore must be read altogether, though far surpassing the usual length of our portions.

Imagine the King, in the full glory of early manhood, and richly arrayed in purple, gold, and white, kneeling on his brazen platform before all the multitudes, and gazing intently upon the noble edifice, where he knew, though he might not see it, that the intense Light which no man could endure was filling the golden chamber he had prepared ; the eager people behind in the courts ; the white-robed host of Levites, and the gorgeously clad brotherhood of priests before him, and the smoke of the sacrifices rising up from the altar.

There, in that supreme moment of his life, he knelt, with outstretched hands, owning first God's perfect truth and complete fulfilment of His covenant. He does not regard this work as so much his own as God's fulfilment of the promise. May the promise as surely be renewed in the future to him and to his children.

But then, utterly overpowered at the thought of the grace done to

him, Solomon breaks out : " But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee ; how much less this house which I have built ! " His soul seems to swell within him at the thought of the presence of the Incomprehensible God being in the house that himself had raised ; perceiving how that Presence, like sunlight, can be in heaven, and yet all over the earth, and intensified here and there (as in a diamond). Yet, since His presence has thus been manifested, Solomon goes on to entreat, with an earnest reiteration, that whatever prayers should be made in faith, shown by looking towards the Mercy Seat in this house, should be heard and granted.

The first case he puts is that of the oath to end a strife, as in Exodus xxii. 11 it is directed that in case any damage happens to property committed to a neighbour's charge, the claim of the owner to redress should be decided by the oath of the guardian as to whether he could have prevented the mischief or not. Solomon, who in the case of the two women had seen that words and oaths cannot always be trusted, prayed that when people came to swear before God's Altar, His power would interpose to show the right (Levit. xxiv. 19). He goes on, taking up the very words of the threats of Moses, as to the evils that might come—defeat, invasion, drought, famine, pestilence, blight, locust, or any other calamity—entreating that still a faithful prayer towards the Temple might be heard, and bring healing. And above all, when each man feels what is so well called here " the plague of his own heart," " the sin that doth so easily beset us," may God hear, and forgive. He who alone knows the hearts of men ! Again and again should we watch such prayers, and trace the healing they brought ! Nay, even for the stranger, Solomon entreated. Doubtless many a Tyrian mason, wood-cutter, or gold-worker, many a stout Cherethite and Pelethite, some Egyptians attendant on the Queen, with faithful Kenites, and even some Edomites and Moabites, would stand far back in the Gentiles' court, and hear the King out of the largeness of his heart pray that their devotions when offered to the one true JEHOVAH might be accepted and blessed. But Solomon looks on to a sadder page. If there be sin ! (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and the heaviest judgment denounced by Moses be incurred, namely, captivity in a stranger's land, then still let the earnest prayer towards

this temple be heard, and let pardon be granted, and let a blessed return be vouchsafed ! So prayed the King, with a chastening thought in the midst of his splendour and thankfulness—a thought of the ruin of that mighty city and that magnificent fabric ! So prayed the captive prophet five hundred years later, when Jerusalem was a desert and the Temple a heap of stones, and ere long the people had returned and were again worshipping there. And the beautiful intercession closes with an entreaty to God to arise and dwell therein, and to turn not away the presence of His Anointed ; a petition far more full of meaning than even that wisest of men knew, and which was repeated earnestly by the framers of the 132nd Psalm, as they builded that second Temple which was indeed to receive the presence of the Christ.

LESSON CXXXVII.

THE ANSWER TO SOLOMON.

B.C. 1005-992.—1 KINGS vi. ; 2 CHRON. vii.

Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices ; and the glory of the LORD filled the house.

And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever.

Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep : so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

And the priests waited on their offices : the Levites also with instruments of music of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry ; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood.

Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD : for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brazen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat.

Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering* in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt.

And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly : for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.

And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.

* * * * *

But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.

He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon.

And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people ;

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways ; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent† unto the prayer that is made in this place.

For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever : and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments ;

Then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.

But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them ;

Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them ; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations.

And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it ; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house ?

And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them : therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

COMMENT.—The answer to Solomon's prayer was granted in the sight of all the congregation, for fire came down from heaven and burnt the sacrifice upon the great altar. The glory within the

* Way to.

† Attentive.

Tabernacle was hidden from the people, even from Solomon himself: only the priests could see it flashing through the veil; but this fire, consuming the offerings, was visible to all, and proved God's acceptance. Therefore all might well fall on their faces in awe, and yet in rejoicing.

Then came the thank and peace offerings which were to serve for the festival. The fat and inwards were burnt, and the quantity was so immense that the brazen altar did not suffice; but the middle part of the court of the priests had to be consecrated for it. The shoulder and breast of each animal were given to the priests; the givers feasted on the rest, and sent a share to the poor who brought none for themselves, so that there was one great communion and fellowship. The feast lasted seven days, and was followed by the feast of the Tabernacles; and then the happy and blessed people returned to their homes, looking forward to meeting again in the spring at the Passover.

Then Solomon applied himself to building his own palace, including what was called the house of the Forest of Lebanon, because it was built with cedar. This work lasted thirteen years—we may suppose because he did not press it on like the Temple. When it was just completed, and Solomon's splendour had reached its height, the same vision as he had had at Gideon came to him. God took up and answered in words his prayer of dedication, promising all he had asked, and adding a warning to the king himself. All blessings should be his if he were faithful, and his children after him; but if not, his buildings would become a ruin and desolation, so that people would wonder over them what could have caused their destruction.

Such is always the way. Be faithful, and "grace well used brings more grace:" be unfaithful, and the blessings misused shall be taken away.

LESSON CXXXVIII.*

SOLOMON'S PRAISE OF WISDOM.

ABOUT B.C. 1000.—PROVERBS viii. *and* ix.

I Wisdom dwell with Prudence,
And find out knowledge of witty† inventions.
The fear of the LORD is to hate evil:
Pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way,
And the froward mouth, do I hate.
Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom:
I am understanding; I have strength.
By me kings reign,
And princes decree justice.
By me princes rule,
And nobles, even all the judges of the earth.
I love them that love me;
And those that seek me early shall find me.
Riches and honour are with me;
Yea, durable riches and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold;
And my revenue than choice silver.
I lead in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of judgment:
That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance;
And I will fill their treasures.
The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way,
Before his works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,
Or ever the earth was.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth;
When there were no fountains abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills was I brought forth:
While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields,
Nor the highest part of the dust of the world.
When he prepared the heavens, I was there:
When he set a compass‡ upon the face of the depth:
When he established the clouds above:
When he strengthened the fountains of the deep:
When he gave to the sea his decree,
That the waters should not pass his commandment:
When he appointed the foundations of the earth:

* Not for the younger ones.

† Wise.

‡ A circle.

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him :
And I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him :
Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth ;
And my delights were with the sons of men.
Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children :
For blessed are they that keep my ways.
Hear instruction, and be wise,
And refuse it not.
Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates,
Waiting at the posts of my doors.
For whoso findeth me findeth life,
And shall obtain favour of the LORD.
But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul :
All they that hate me love death.
Wisdom hath builded her house,
She hath hewn out her seven pillars :
She hath killed her beasts ; she hath mingled her wine ;
She hath also furnished her table.
She hath sent forth her maidens :
She crieth upon the highest places of the city,
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither :
As for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,
Come, eat of my bread,
And drink of the wine which I have mingled.

* * * * *

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom :
And the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
For by me thy days shall be multiplied,
And the years of thy life shall be increased.

COMMENT.—We are told that Solomon spake three thousand proverbs (1 Kings iv. 32) ; and in this book we have them collected—the choice sayings of the wise king's manhood, as his Song is the pouring out of the happiness of his youth.

Maushal, the Hebrew word that our translators have rendered "proverb," means a similitude or comparison, as in effect most proverbs or bywords of both Scripture and common life do teach some large and wide truth by some short pithy saying on small homely things. For instance, "Fine feathers do not make fine birds !" is a similitude, showing shortly that a gay outward appearance is not to be trusted. Sometimes it has been said that the proverbs of a nation are its wisdom collected together in short compass ; and all the Eastern nations have a great turn for proverbs, and love to store them up as means of giving advice without offence. Thus, *Maushal*, the term for a figurative proverb, or short

parable, came to be applied to poetry consisting chiefly of similitudes ; and this Book of Solomon was written in such poetry, in short verses, generally making contrasts between folly and wisdom, virtue and vice.

The book is divided into five parts, of which the first two seem to have been put together in Solomon's lifetime. The first nine chapters all make one poem, addressed to his son, or, it may be, to his pupil, exhorting him to obedience, and warning him of the different issues of the two paths of life. It is a strong contrast between Wisdom and Folly, and describes in detail the lot of the man who follows the one, or who is led away by the other. By Wisdom, as he had distinctly told us, he did not mean mere earthly knowledge and learning, but holiness ; by Foolishness, not mere slowness of mind, but sinfulness. For true wisdom is the love of good ; and to hate good is the utmost folly. Throughout this poem, wisdom and foolishness are personified—that is, spoken of as persons ; and we see them both spoken of under the figure of women, inviting their followers to listen to them.

Sin is represented as a winning temptress, lying in wait to invite the unwary loiterer to feast with her, saying—

Stolen waters are sweet,
And bread eaten in secret is pleasant ;
But he knoweth not that the dead are there,
And that her guests are in the depths of hell !

Wisdom, on the other hand, is a glorious being, calling openly to the young and old to follow her, and be trained in her paths :

Length of days are in her right hand,
And in her left hand riches and honour :
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.

Nay, as Sin, "lurking in the thievish corners of the street," is no mere *idea*, but he that brought sin into the world—Satan with his evil angels—so Wisdom is not merely abstract goodness, but the Author and Giver of all goodness. And Solomon "speaks of things more glorious than he knew" when he is carried up into the
* of prophecy ; and the Wisdom he describes rises above
holiness, and becomes the Wisdom of God, the Eternal

Word, the Christ Himself, who was to come into the world. So alone can the words be true—

Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills, was I brought forth.

* * * *

When He gave the sea His decree, that the waters should not
pass His commandment:

When He appointed the foundations of the earth:

Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him:

And I was daily His delight, rejoicing in Him.

It is thus in prophecy that Solomon goes on to speak of Eternal Wisdom, the Word of God, building the house of God, the Church on the Seven Pillars—the Seven Graces of the Holy Spirit; killing the Sacrifice—the One Lamb offered from the foundation of the world; and crying aloud—

Come, eat of My bread,
And drink of the wine that I have mingled.

Again, the Greater than Solomon is here, crying, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life" (St. John vi. 54). "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. iii. 20).

After the nine chapters thus comparing the paths of Satan with the ways of Christ, there follow twelve chapters, headed "The Proverbs of Solomon," all consisting of short, wise, pithy sayings. Sometimes they sound as if only shrewd observations on this world's matters; but they go deeper—they are inspired proverbs, and have mysteries of God hidden in them, which shine out to the eyes that see them truly. As far as the twenty-fourth chapter was probably collected in Solomon's lifetime, and must contain most of his three thousand proverbs; but it seems that there were others of his current among the people, though not written down till Hezekiah's time, when they were collected, and added to the older book.

LESSON CXXXIX

SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY.

B.C. 992.—I KINGS x. 1—24, 27.

And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.

And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones : and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

And Solomon told her all her questions : there was not anything hid from the king, which he told her not.

And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built,

And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD ; there was no more spirit in her.

And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom.

Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it : and, behold, the half was not told me : thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.

Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighteth in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel : because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones : there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.

And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug* trees, and precious stones.

And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers : there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day.

And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold.

* Sandal-wood.

Beside that he had of the merchantmen, and of the traffic of the spice merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country.

And king Solomon made two hundred targets * of beaten gold : six hundred shekels of gold went to one target.

And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold ; three pound of gold went to one shield : and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon.

Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold.

The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind : and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays.

And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps : there was not the like made in any kingdom.

And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold ; none were of silver : it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.

For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram : once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.

And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.

* * * * *

And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance.

"The kings of Tharshish and of the isles shall bring presents : the kings of Arabia and Seba shall offer gifts" (Psalm lxxii.). So David had predicted, and the fame of Solomon even reached Sheba—that southern corner of Arabia Felix now called Yemen—whence the Queen came, drawn by his renown for wisdom. Who she was or what was her history we know not, but all we do know is that "her praise is in the Gospel," and that it could have been no idle curiosity or worldly honour for Solomon's wealth that drew this daughter of Abraham, and very possibly of Job, to the feet of the man full of heavenly wisdom. For not only is the prophecy above of her coming, likewise the prophecy of the wise men from the East doing homage to the Saviour, but she is the type of the Gentile world offering its riches to Christ ; and, what is more, her example is the warning of those who will not seek unto the true Anointed.

* Shields.

The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon ; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. (Matt. xxi. 2.)

These are His own very words, spoken to us as well as to her.

The Abyssinians, without any real ground, fancy their dynasty is descended from her, and both Jews and Arabs have many wild silly stories of her experiments on Solomon's wisdom, but all that is really known of her is comprised in this brief account. The ascent which Solomon made to the house of God is, by some, thought to have been a magnificent marble staircase up Mount Moriah, and by more recent explorers to have been a wondrous bridge, spanning the Tyropæon, or ravine between Mount Zion and Mount Moriah, of which the ponderous masonry has lately been found ; while others think it merely means the spectacle of the king's going up to worship at the Temple. At any rate, the warmth of her speech to him, and her words about his servants' happiness, should come home to us when we apply them to the Greater than Solomon.

Her gifts to the king were great, and so were his in return. At the same time, his alliance with Hiram of Tyre had led to his building ships at Ezion-geber, at the northern end of the Red Sea, to go to Ophir for gold and sandal-wood ; and in the Mediterranean ports, to go to Tharshish for gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. Where Ophir was has always been a difficulty, but it must either have been in India or else the southern part of Arabia, which was then rich in gold that has since become exhausted. Tharshish meant Tartessus, in Spain. Ships of Tharshish was the name given to all those that sailed westwards to Asia Minor, Greece, Sicily, Carthage, or Spain, in all of which the Phœnicians had trade and colonies. There was gold and silver then in Spain ; ivory and monkeys would be procured through the Carthaginians ; and the peacocks had probably been brought through Tyre itself from India, since it is certain that, though natives of India, these beautiful birds were always known in Europe, though this is probably the first mention of them.* Such was the profusion of good things that silver was as common as stones, and cedar as the wood of the sycamore or fig mulberry ! Solomon used the sandal-wood

* The peacocks in the Book of Job are ostriches.

for props in his palace, as well as for musical instruments for the Levites ; and with the gold he overlaid shields for his body-guard on great occasions, keeping them hung up in his cedar chamber. And for himself he formed a gorgeous throne, inlaid of gold and ivory, raised upon six steps, each step guarded by the golden figure of a lion on each side—in honour, no doubt, of the lion of the tribe of Judah, and to show the lion-like qualities of power and generosity required of the king.

The magnificence of Solomon, in his robes of state, on his throne, must have been unrivalled ; but One who had seen him looked forth upon the flowers that smiled in the sunshine, and said :

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin :

And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Solomon built Tadmor, the City of Palms, in the wilderness, between Palestine and the Euphrates ; the city on an oasis, admired and conquered ages after by the Romans, and marvelled at in later times by travellers, who have been startled by its columns standing forth over the waste of sand.

LESSON CXL.

THE FALL OF SOLOMON.

ABOUT B.C. 984.—I KINGS xi. 1—17, 21, 22.

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites ;

Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not take them, neither shall they take you : for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods : Solomon clave unto these in love.

And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines : and his wives turned away his heart.

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods : and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.

Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice,

And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods : but he kept not that which the LORD commanded.

Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake : but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.

Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom ; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite : he was of the king's seed in Edom.

For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom ;

(For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom :)

That Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt ; Hadad being yet a little child.

And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country.

Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country ? And he answered, Nothing : howbeit let me go in any wise.

COMMENT.—The sins of holy men are especially perilous to those who come after and find their faults easier to imitate than their virtues. David had erred in multiplying wives, and Solomon went still further, gathering to himself women in the same profusion as his gold and silver. He seems to have begun to be vain-glorious, and to have forgotten who was the Giver of his wealth ; and whereas other Eastern kings collected numbers of wives and slaves, he would not be outdone by them in anything. It was nearly a century and a half since there had been idolatry in Israel,

and Solomon no doubt thought it so utterly absurd and foolish that there was no need of guarding against it ; but when he had surrounded himself with these fair women, daughters of heathen princes, he could not withstand their entreaties for the rites of their childhood. One wife, and she the virtuous woman of his mother's poem, would have been the crown of his reign ; but these childish Eastern females had probably little mind to understand him and his religion, even if he tried to teach them, and he seems to have thought it could do no harm to gratify the ignorant creatures by letting each serve her own idol in her own way. Perhaps his largeness of heart became a snare to him, by letting him think it mattered little whether they remained heathen or not ; and, moreover, that if he drew numbers of strangers to trade at Jerusalem, it was hard to deny them their favourite idols. So he who had built the House of God, reared three idol temples on Mount Olivet, above the slope of the beautiful gardens where his apes and peacocks disported themselves. The temples were to Astarte, or Ashtoreth, the moon goddess ; to Chemosh, the god of the star, said to have been the same as Baal-peor ; and to Milcom, or Molech, the "horrid king, besmeared with blood," to whom children were offered, though no doubt Solomon hindered the more frightful parts of the ritual, and very possibly thought himself purifying and refining it when, to gratify his favourites, he even shared in the observances he despised. But, behold, there was something interesting and engaging in these rites when he came to try them ; the women charmed him, and he found everything more delightful than the grave temple worship. Could it be so very wrong, after all, to act the allegory of the fair Earth weeping the death of Spring, and rejoicing in his return, or to describe in figures of stone Time devouring his offspring ? After all, the Israelite sternness was unjust and unkind ! And so the heart that had once been so wise and so devoted was drawn more and more to those heathen rites, and, meanwhile, health and strength of mind and body failed, and at an age when his father was still a mighty man of valour, Solomon was feeble and led away by foolish women. Then came an awakening. God again spake to him. He was destroying the very purpose for which Israel had been chosen to provide a pure race, a witness and guardian of the truth. God did not want

another great merchant city, the resort of all nations, and with a little of all their religions to suit everybody. Jerusalem could only be saved from corruption by taking away her wealth and power, and leaving her only her own poor rocks. So the greater part of the kingdom should be rent away—not, however, in Solomon's own time, but in his son's, in whom, for David's sake, the family should be continued; though, probably, Solomon already saw how weak and foolish was this only son, Rehoboam.

And in earnest of this disaster, the Edomites, whom David had conquered and almost destroyed, began to "break the yoke off their neck." One child of the royal family had been taken into Egypt, and, returning when grown to man's estate, lived among the rocks and caves of Mount Seir, collecting together the broken nation, and raising it up to be again a thorn in the side of Israel.

So, as Solomon fell from the truest wisdom, he lost those gifts that had been added to it, length of days, honour, and peace.

LESSON CXLI.

THE APPOINTMENT OF JEROBOAM.

B.C. 984.—1 KINGS xi. 26—40.

And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king.

And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo,* and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father.

And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.

And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way, and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they too were alone in the field:

And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces:

And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee:

* The citadel.

But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel :

Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father.

Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand : but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes :

But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes.

And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.

And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel.

And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did ; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.

And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.

Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

COMMENT.—Another enemy who rose up against Solomon was a runaway Syrian outlaw, but the worst of all was Jeroboam. It appears that among Solomon's buildings was the strengthening of Millo, or the citadel, and closing up the line of walls between the Temple hill and Mount Zion. From what follows, it would seem that he had become oppressive when he became proud, and the old jealousy between Judah and Israel that had begun in the time of Ishbosheth, and shown itself again after Absalom's overthrow, produced discontent at thus toiling for a city that was chiefly the strength and glory of Judah. The person who was put in charge of the labourers, summoned from the great tribe of Ephraim, and perhaps also of Manasseh, was a strong and brave young man named Jeroboam, and it was he who was marked out to form the new kingdom that was to be separated from the present.

The same probation was given to him as had been to David. Ahijah, a native of Shiloh, where the tabernacle had originally been pitched, and, like himself, of Ephraim, came to him inspired by God. Jeroboam was wearing a sort of soldier's mantle, a great

square of cloth. This the prophet rent into twelve pieces, and gave Jeroboam ten, retaining two. It was a visible token that God would give him ten tribes, and that only two, namely Judah and Benjamin, should remain to the house of David. There were many promises of the glory of Ephraim : Joseph had been treated as Jacob's first-born, and Ephraim as Joseph's, and the parting prophecies of both Israel and Moses had promised him prosperity exceeding even that of Judah. Joshua had partly enjoyed the fulfilment of those promises, and still greater prospects were held out to Jeroboam if he would faithfully keep the covenant. If he would follow David's example, he should have David's blessings, and his family should reign after him in glory. It does not appear that Jeroboam failed at first in patience, but Solomon, hearing of the prediction, forgot the lesson which the example of Saul might have taught him, and tried to put Jeroboam to death. He fled into Egypt, where a new race of kings had risen to the throne different from the Pharaoh whose daughter Solomon had married, and Shishak, or Sheshonk, an able and powerful king, was glad to encourage any foe to the mighty sovereign of Israel, and as he had before sheltered Hadad of Edom, so he now received Jeroboam ; and it may be supposed that during this time the faith of the Ephraimite gave way amid the idolatries of Egypt, and though he did not cease to believe in the Lord God of his fathers, he no longer considered it needful to pay Him honour in the manner he himself had appointed.

LESSON CXLII.*

SOLOMON'S WEARINESS.

ABOUT B.C. 980.—ECCLES.† i. ; ii. I—II.

The words of the Preacher the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.
What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun ?
One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh : but the earth abideth for ever.

* Not for the younger ones.

† A few modern critics dispute this book being by Solomon, but there is no reasonable ground for so doing.

The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:

I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy ; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour : and this was my portion of all my labour.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do : and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

COMMENT.—The narrative books of Scripture say nothing of Solomon after his sentence ; indeed, the Book of Chronicles never censures him at all : but he, like his father, has shown us his inner self, as well as his outward life ; and there is a book where, as we have known him in the joy of his youth and the thoughtfulness of his manhood, so we see him in the heart sickness of his old age, after he had tried all this world could give, and found that it could not satisfy his spirit. The name of the book is the Greek word for “a preacher,” but the Hebrew name is *Gatherer*—gatherer together, as it were, of the fragments that were left of his life, and likewise showing that there was still one place of union or gathering together of the tribes that were soon to be separated through his sin. It is the book of his repentance and mourning over the ills that his foolish son and self-willed people would undergo, yet showing them the only rest and stay.

Remember the last words of the aged and much-tried David. Even his tears of repentance were like rain after which the tender grass sprang freshly up. It is all morning, all hope, all freshness, all new ; his soul is at rest, for he has all his desire. All is new with David : but with Solomon, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be ; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.” “This is all my desire,” says David. Solomon says, “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing.”

For David’s heart was whole with God, therefore he could, “through the world’s sad day of strife, still chant his morning song.” Solomon let the pleasures of the bodily senses eat into his heart, and hide his God from him, till they all turned to vanity and vexation of spirit ! And this book is a lesson what it is to have the whole world without the true secret of joy.

Again and again in his first eleven verses, Solomon says how everything is the same over and over again, in one round of vanity and vexation of spirit ; and then he begins to look back on his own

life. King of Israel, in all his power, he first thought to find content in deep learning ; but, study as he would, he could not satisfy himself. And the most skilful mathematicians and arithmeticians will tell you that they are stopped just where he was : "That which is crooked cannot be made straight : that which is wanting cannot be numbered" (Eccles. i. 15). And as to his whole mass of knowledge and thought, it was all a burthen of sorrow and emptiness.

Then he tried mirth and laughter, but a grave mind like his soon found them mad and empty (ii. 2). Then he tried state and grandeur ; he describes the riches he heaped up, his choice gardens and stately buildings ; and he might have enjoyed them but for the thought that poisons all such pleasures—how soon he must leave them, and what would become of them then ? The gardens, a little way from Bethlehem, are still pointed out. The spot is lovely, and part of it has been purchased for the use of Christian Jews, who find the soil wonderfully fertile. There the lilies of the field still blossom, and remind us of Solomon in all his glory, and the emptiness of that glory so soon as he trusted to that instead of to his God.

LESSON CXLIII.*

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

ABOUT B.C. 980.—ECCLES. xi. 7—10 ; xii.

Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun :

But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all ; yet let him remember the days of darkness ; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh : for childhood and youth are vanity.

* Not for the younger ones.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them ;

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain :

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low ;

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets ;

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was : and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher ; all is vanity.

And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge ; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words : and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

And further, by these, my son, be admonished : of making many books there is no end ; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Fear God, and keep his commandments : for this is the whole duty of man.

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

COMMENT.—Solomon continues to tell us how, having failed to find rest or comfort in study, mirth, or splendour, he had looked out on the world and seen that God ordered regular times and seasons for everything, that take their course, and that, in his opinion, all man can do is to live quietly, and do good, enjoying as much as he can in the fear of the Lord (chap. iii. 13). He goes on showing the result of his experience—that the course of this world is not satisfactory ; that it is not the best, or the most able, or the most industrious that get rewards, and that even when they do, riches are of very little use : “when goods are increased, they are increased that eat them, and what good is there to the owners of, save the beholding of them with their eyes ?” (chap. v. 11.)

Nay, the poor is often happier than the rich, and death comes to all alike, and then a man and all his doings are forgotten.

He puts it in one different form after another, all sad and mournful, that little credit comes of the greatest exertions, and success does not often crown our labours ; or, when it does, it is little worth having, and soon over : and at every pause comes the same advice, to go through this life calmly and peaceably, without straining after the great things that will end in disappointment, whether gained or missed.

All the point is gathered up in the last two chapters. There he bethinks himself that after all it is not "time and chance," as he had before said, "that prevents the battle being to the strong, or the race to the swift, or bread to the wise" (chap. ix. 11) ; but the guiding hand of God, which, wise man as he is, he can no more understand than he can the courses of the clouds, or the formation of the unborn child. So he recommends a faithful life, doing all the good we can, and being content to wait without seeing the effect, casting bread on the waters, sure to find it after many days, and doing our daily work without watching the clouds.

And here comes the summing up of Solomon's experience. Youth is a joyful thing, full of cheerfulness. There is no reason that we should not be happy in it, but still remembering that for whatever is then done, God will bring us to judgment. If He be forgotten in youth, there is nothing but gloom in old age ; and the king goes on to draw his picture of age—probably from himself. Pleasure in the delights of youth has gone by. All the brightest sights have grown dull, and the clouds of sorrow come thick one upon another. The keepers of the house, the arms, tremble with feebleness ; the strong men, the pillars, or legs, are bent and bowed down ; the windows, the eyes, are darkened ; and the grinders, the teeth, are few ; the lips, or doors, are closed, and the spirits are grown weak and nervous, startled by the voice of a bird, and afraid to climb a hill, easily giddy upon a height. The silver hair is like the almond in blossom, and the slightest weight or trouble is a grievance ; for man is near that long eternal home of his, and the mourners will soon bear him to his grave. Yes, remember thy Creator, or ever—that is, before—the silver cord, those slender white nerves that convey sensation, and where life resides,—be loosed ; or the pitcher,

the earthen vessel of our body, be broken at the fountain ; or the wheel, the blood, ever circulating from the heart,* be broken at the cistern ; while the dust returns to the earth, and the spirit to the God who gave it. So the weary spirit of the king returned in his 60th year ; but he had left his words to goad or prick us to well-doing, or as nails, tent-pegs or stakes, given out by one shepherd, namely, the true Shepherd of Israel, to gather in one assembly, one tent, one fold, one rule, one hope, the flock of the tribes, now about to be broken and scattered. With one tender word to Rehoboam, he ends by the conclusion of the whole matter : " Fear God, and keep His commandments : for this is the whole duty of man."

And those simple words are the result of all the thinking, and all the learning, and all the experience of the wisest and the richest, and the most prosperous man that ever lived !

Everything else he had found vanity and vexation of spirit ; and it is of this great lesson that he is the preacher. He is a prophet here chiefly by showing that all the prosperity that was held out to Israel as the reward of keeping the Law was in itself, at the very best, poor and unsatisfying, so that they must look beyond ; and there is one verse showing to Whom to look : " I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second Child that shall stand up in their stead" (chap. iv. 15). But even here the sadness of the book appears, for of too many it is true, " They also that come after shall not rejoice in Him."

And so ends the saddest book of the whole Bible, just before the schism of the Ten Tribes.

* This was a discovery of the time of Charles I., but many other sentences in the book show Solomon's science to have been far in advance of that of the Middle Ages.

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